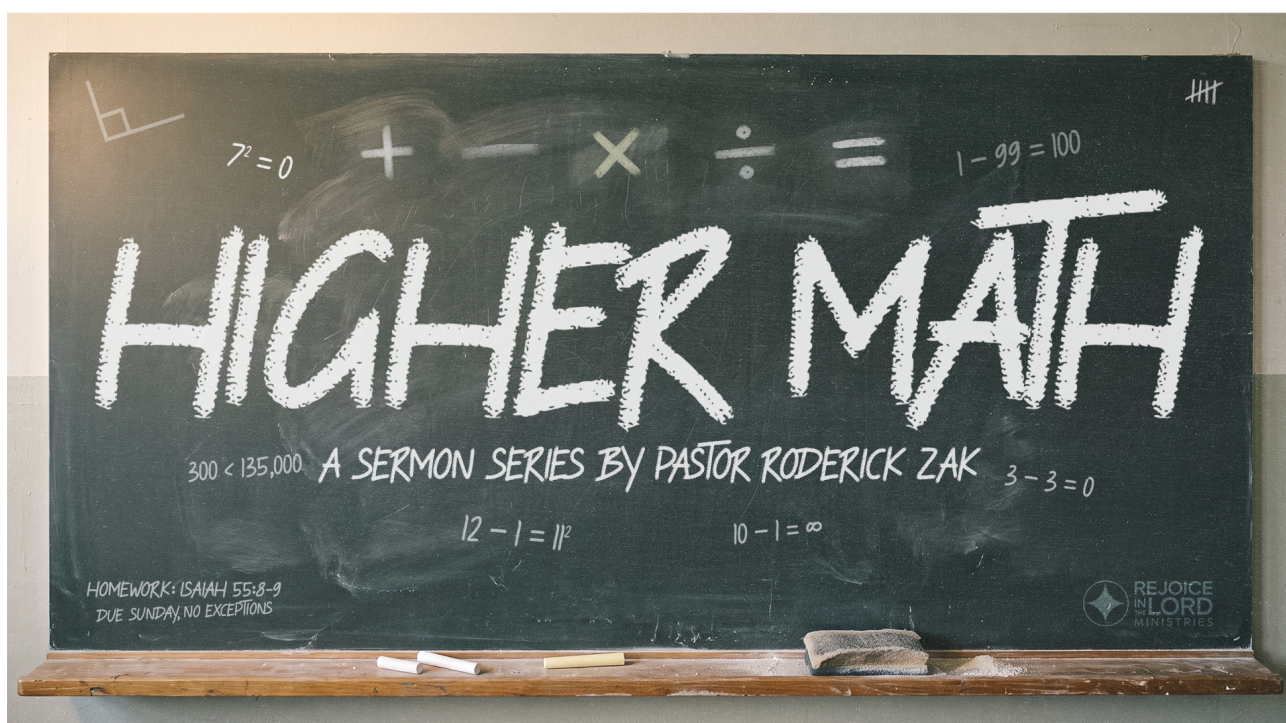




HIGHER MATH

His Ways Are Higher. His Math Still Works.

A THREE WEEK eGROUP STUDY

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV) | Series Anchor

Rejoice in the Lord Ministries

Apopka, Florida

WELCOME TO HIGHER MATH

There are seasons when life does not add up the way we expected it to. A load grows heavier than we can hold, something we counted on slips away, or the road ahead seems to close in front of us. In those moments it helps to remember that God does not work by the world's math. His ways are higher than ours, and His math still works. Over the next three weeks we will look at three ways God works in our lives, with Jesus as our guide.

You do not need a Bible background to be here, and you do not need to have the right words. There are no wrong answers in this room, so come as you are and bring what you have.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Each lesson is built for about one hour and follows the same flow:

- Main Scripture. The verse the whole lesson stands on.
- Scripture Background. A short setup so everyone knows where we are in the Bible.
- Today's Big Idea. The one thing everyone should walk away with.
- The Deep Dive. We slow down and take the main verse one phrase at a time.
- Supporting Scripture. Two verses that widen the picture.
- Key Concepts. How this shows up in everyday life.
- My Personal Story. A word from the pastor's own walk.
- Engagement Questions. Individual reflection, group discussion, and application.
- Weekly Action Steps. Four specific things to carry out the door.
- Thought to Carry. One line to hold on to all week.

THE THREE LESSONS

These three lessons build on each other. We begin with the weight we carry, move to what we are willing to let go of, and finish with the way God makes for His people.

WK	LESSON	SCRIPTURE	BIG IDEA
1	Carry the One	Matthew 11:28-30	We were never meant to carry life alone, and Jesus takes the heavy end.
2	Faithonomics	John 12:24	When we open our hands and plant, God multiplies.
3	Divine Division	Isaiah 43:16	The world divides to tear apart, but God divides to make a way.

A note on the series anchor: Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us that God's ways are higher than our ways. That does not mean God is distant or hard to reach. It means He sees more than we can see and does more than we could ever work out on our own. That promise sits underneath all three of these lessons.

WEEK 1: CARRY THE ONE

God Carries What You Cannot | Duration: 1 Hour

MAIN SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 11:28-30 (ESV)

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Jesus spoke these words to crowds of working people, many of whom were tired from long days of hard labor. They were also weighed down by religious leaders who kept adding rules without offering any help to carry them. Into that setting Jesus gave a warm and personal invitation to come to Him.

Theologically, this passage shows us that Jesus does not stand at a distance handing out instructions. He steps under the load alongside us. He never promises a life without burdens, but He does promise that we will not have to carry them alone.

TODAY'S BIG IDEA

We were never meant to carry life alone. When we bring our weight to Jesus, He takes the heavy end, and He sends people to help us carry the rest.

THE DEEP ONE

- **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden"**
 - The invitation is open to everyone who is tired, and nobody has to qualify before coming.
 - Labor describes the work we do, and heavy laden describes the weight we carry. Jesus speaks to both.
- **"And I will give you rest"**
 - Rest is offered as a gift, so it is something we receive rather than something we earn.
 - This is rest for the inside of a person, which goes deeper than a day off.
- **"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me"**
 - A yoke was a wooden beam that joined two animals so they could pull a load together.
 - Jesus does not tell us to throw off every yoke. He invites us to take His, so that we keep walking, but now we walk with Him.
- **"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"**
 - The word easy here carries the idea of something well fitted, a yoke that does not rub or wear a person down.
 - The burden becomes light because Jesus is carrying the heavier side.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE

Matthew 6:33: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Jesus spoke these words to people who were worried about food and

clothing. Bringing our load to Him begins with putting Him first and then trusting Him to add what we need.

Acts 2:47: "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." The early church faithfully did its part, and God did the adding. From the beginning, His people were meant to walk through life together.

KEY CONCEPTS

Everyone in this room is carrying something. For some it is a stack of bills, for others it is a report from the doctor, and for others it is a child or loved one who feels far away right now. Most of us try to hold all of it by ourselves, but Jesus offers us a better way.

1. **First, Not Leftovers.** When God invited Solomon to ask for anything, Solomon asked for wisdom to lead God's people well. God gave him that wisdom and then added wealth and honor that Solomon had not even asked for (1 Kings 3). When God receives our first hour and our first call, He is faithful to add what we need.
2. **He Takes the Heavy End.** On the road to the cross, Jesus fell under the weight of the wooden beam, and a man named Simon of Cyrene was asked to carry it for Him (Luke 23:26). Simon carried the wood that day, but Jesus carried the weight of our sin. He still takes the heavy end for us today.
3. **Added Together, Not Alone.** Four friends once carried a man who could not walk all the way to Jesus. When the crowd blocked the door, they climbed onto the roof, opened it up, and lowered their friend down in front of Him. Scripture says that Jesus saw their faith (Mark 2:1-5). There are times God sends people to carry us, and there are times He sends us to carry someone else.

Transformation begins when we stop trying to hold the whole weight on our own. We can name what we are carrying when we pray, and we can let a trusted friend in on it. God never designed us to carry life by ourselves.

MY PERSONAL STORY

My father repaired air conditioners and refrigeration equipment, and he could fix almost anything. Every now and then he asked my brothers and me to help him lift something heavy, and my mother would call out and remind him not to have us lifting too much. I remember one day helping him lift an air conditioner. The compressor sat on one side of the unit, which made that side much heavier, so Dad took the heavy side and gave me the light one. I still had to lift, but he carried most of the weight. I think about that often. Ministry can be heavy too, and there are days when I have to take my own advice and remind myself that this is the Lord's church and these are His people. I can plant and water, but God brings the increase. When I let Him take the heavy end, the load becomes something I am able to carry.

ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are you carrying right now that feels heavier than you can hold? You do not have to share details.
2. What usually receives your first hour of the day?
3. When was the last time you allowed someone to help you carry something?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jesus does not promise a life without burdens, but He does offer His yoke. What difference does that make?
2. Why do you think so many people find it hard to ask for help?
3. Jesus saw the faith of the four friends. What does that tell us about the role we play in one another's lives?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What is one thing you could bring to God by name each day this week?
2. Who is someone you could help carry a load this week?
3. What might change in your mornings if you gave God the first few minutes?

WEEKLY ACTION STEPS

1. **The First Minutes:** Give God the first five minutes of each morning before you pick up your phone.
2. **Name the Weight:** Write down one thing you have been carrying alone and pray about it by name each day.
3. **Let Someone In:** Share what you are carrying with one trusted, praying person and ask them to pray with you.
4. **Be a Friend Who Carries:** Reach out to one person who could use a meal, a ride, or a phone call this week.

THOUGHT TO CARRY

We still have our part to lift, but we never lift alone, because Jesus takes the heavy end.

WEEK 2: FAITHONOMICS

Open Hands, Bigger Harvest | Duration: 1 Hour

MAIN SCRIPTURE: JOHN 12:24 (ESV)

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Jesus spoke these words in Jerusalem only days before the cross, after some Greek visitors came asking to see Him. He answered by talking about a seed, and in doing so He was describing His own death and resurrection. His one life, laid down, would produce a great harvest of people for God, and that harvest includes each of us.

Theologically, this passage also helps us think about loss. God is not the author of every loss we experience. We live in a broken world, and people, including ourselves, sometimes make choices that cause pain. Yet God is able to redeem loss, and when we choose to open our hands and give, He takes what looks like less and turns it into more.

TODAY'S BIG IDEA

The world teaches us to hold on tightly in order to have more, but God's economy works differently. When we open our hands and plant, God multiplies.

THE DEEP DIVE

- **"Truly, truly, I say to you"**
 - Jesus uses these words when He wants His listeners to pay close attention.
 - What follows is a picture of how God's kingdom actually works.
- **"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth"**
 - A seed has to leave the farmer's hand and go into the ground before anything can happen.
 - As long as a seed stays in a pocket, it will never grow.
- **"And dies, it remains alone"**
 - When a seed is planted, it stops being only a seed and gives itself to what it will become.
 - A seed that is kept safe will always remain just one seed.
- **"But if it dies, it bears much fruit"**
 - Once it is planted, a single seed can become a harvest far larger than itself.
 - Jesus is that seed. He was buried on Friday and rose on Sunday, and the harvest from His life is still coming in today.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE

Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Paul gave up running his own life, and Christ became the center of it. Making

less room for himself made more room for Christ.

2 Corinthians 9:6: "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." Paul wrote this to a church that was preparing a gift for believers in need, reminding them that the size of the harvest follows the size of the planting.

KEY CONCEPTS

Most of us would like a little more in life, whether that is a paycheck that stretches further, a few more hours in the day, or a little more peace and room to breathe. The world tells us the way to have more is to hold on tighter, but Jesus shows us that the way to more begins with an open hand.

1. **God Redeems Loss.** Perhaps a promotion went to someone else, the paycheck does not stretch the way it once did, or the house has grown quieter than it used to be. God did not cause all of those things, but He is able to take what was lost and bring something good out of it.
2. **He Must Increase.** When John the Baptist saw the crowds leaving to follow Jesus, he did not try to hold on to them. Instead he said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). In another scene, a woman poured a jar of perfume worth a year's wages over Jesus. Some people called it a waste, but Jesus called it a beautiful thing (Mark 14:3-9). Nothing we give to God is ever wasted.
3. **God Multiplies What We Release.** A young boy offered his lunch of five loaves and two fish, and Jesus blessed it, broke it, and fed thousands with twelve baskets left over (John 6:9-13). A widow in Zarephath had only enough flour and oil for one last meal, yet she fed the prophet Elijah first, and her flour and oil did not run out (1 Kings 17:8-16). Small gifts placed in God's hands become more than enough.

Transformation happens when we stop waiting until we have more before we become generous, because having more does not change our hearts on its own. We can open our hands now and plant what we already have, trusting that the harvest will always be larger than the seed.

MY PERSONAL STORY

When we were preparing to build our sanctuary, we had a strong financing arrangement in place with a bank. It offered a good rate and a long time to pay, and we had already invested a good deal of money to secure it. Then the economy took a downturn, and shortly before we were to receive the funds, that bank closed. We turned to a church loan fund instead, and at first it seemed like a step backward, since the rate and the monthly payment were both higher and the time to pay was shorter. From where I stood, it looked like a loss. As the downturn deepened, though, that loan fund worked with us in ways a bank never would have, allowing us to pay interest only during the tighter seasons. While other churches lost their buildings during that time, we kept moving forward and kept growing. What I first saw as a loss turned out to be a blessing, and God was working out something for the long term that I simply could not see yet.

ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think of something that felt like a loss at the time but later turned out for good. What happened?
2. Who has helped you grow in your walk with God, and what did they do?
3. What is one thing you could place in God's hands this week?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think people sometimes blame God for losses He did not cause?
2. John the Baptist was content to become smaller so that Jesus could become greater. Why is that difficult for most of us?
3. The boy's lunch fed thousands of people. What does that story teach us about the little we have?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What do you have, whether time, skill, knowledge, or money, that could help someone else this week?
2. Where might God be asking you to open your hand right now?
3. What is one small seed you could plant this week and trust God to grow?

WEEKLY ACTION STEPS

1. **The Loss and Gain Page:** Write down one past loss along with one good thing God brought out of it, and thank Him for it.
2. **Plant One Seed:** Offer someone a ride, buy a meal, share your testimony, or invite someone to church.
3. **Share What You Know:** Teach something you know how to do to someone who could benefit from it.
4. **Truth Scripting:** Write out John 12:24 and place it where you will see it each time you pay your bills.

THOUGHT TO CARRY

A seed kept in a pocket will never grow, so open your hand, plant what you have, and trust God with the harvest.

WEEK 3: DIVINE DIVISION

God Divides to Make a Way | Duration: 1 Hour

MAIN SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 43:16 (ESV)

"Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters,"

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Isaiah spoke these words to God's people many years after the Exodus, reminding them of the night God opened the Red Sea. Pharaoh's army was closing in behind them and the water stretched out in front of them, so it looked as though there was nowhere to go. Moses told the people to keep moving forward toward the water, and God divided the sea so they could walk across on dry ground (Exodus 14:21).

Theologically, this verse tells us something about God's character. Making a way is not simply something He did once in history. It is who He is, and the same God who divided the sea is still making a way for His people today.

TODAY'S BIG IDEA

In the world, division tends to tear things apart, but when God divides, He does it to bless. He divides to make a way forward, to set us apart as His own, and to give each of us our portion.

THE DEEP DIVE

- **"Thus says the LORD"**
 - These are God's own words rather than someone's opinion.
 - When God speaks, what He says can be trusted.
- **"Who makes a way"**
 - Making a way is part of who God is. He has done it before, and He is still doing it now.
 - A way is a road we can walk on, which means God does more than rescue us. He gives us a path forward.
- **"In the sea"**
 - God did not lead His people around the problem. He made a road straight through the middle of it.
 - The walls of water that looked like the end became the sides of a highway.
- **"A path in the mighty waters"**
 - The very thing that seemed like it would overwhelm them became their way out.
 - What stands in our way can become the way God leads us through.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE

Leviticus 20:26: "You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine." God set His people apart because they belonged to Him. Being set apart is not about being better than anyone else. It is about belonging to God.

Psalms 16:5-6: "The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance." When Israel entered

the promised land, God divided it so that every tribe received its share. David rejoices that God Himself holds his portion.

KEY CONCEPTS

When we hear the word division, we usually think of something painful, like a family that has drifted apart or friends who no longer speak. When God divides, however, He is not tearing us apart. From the first page of the Bible, when He separated light from darkness and water from dry land, God has been dividing in order to create, to protect, and to bless.

1. **He Makes a Way.** At the Red Sea, God did not tell His people to turn around and fight the army behind them. He told them to keep walking toward the water. When a bill is due before the money arrives, or a door we were counting on closes, we can take the next step in front of us and trust God with what lies ahead.
2. **He Sets Us Apart.** During the plagues in Egypt, God drew a line around the land of Goshen, where His people lived, and what came upon Egypt did not cross that line (Exodus 8:22-23). God has drawn a line around us as well. We belong to Him now, so we no longer have to live by who we used to be or let old habits and old circles decide how we spend our time.
3. **He Gives Our Portion.** God made sure every tribe received a share of the land, and in the same way, He has a portion with each of our names on it. When looking at other people's lives online begins to make us feel behind, it may be time to set the phone down for a while and thank God for what He has already given us.

The greatest way God ever made is Jesus. When Jesus died, the curtain in the temple that separated people from God's presence was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). He opened the way to God for all of us. There is an old story about a painting of a chess game in which the king appeared to be beaten. A master chess player studied it for a long time and then announced that the king still had another move. In the same way, our God always has another move.

MY PERSONAL STORY

About two weeks before we started Rejoice, we still did not have a place to meet. I had visited one location after another, and each one fell through. I was tired, and we were praying and trying to find our way forward. One afternoon I lay down to rest, and during that rest God brought a thought to my mind about a Christian play I had seen called The Rock and the Rabbi, and the theater where it had been performed. That theater was the Plaza Theatre, and it became our church home for the next five years. At the time it seemed as though we might not find a place to begin at all, yet God already had a door open for us. Since then I have learned that when things seem to come to a full stop, God is often preparing to start something new.

ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When has God made a way for you when you could not see one?
2. Is there any part of who you used to be that still shapes how you see yourself?
3. What are you most grateful for in your own portion right now?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. God told Israel to keep walking rather than turn and fight. Why do you think that was His instruction?
2. How is the way God divides different from the kind of division we see in the world?
3. What helps people stop comparing their lives to what they see online?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What is the next step you can take in a situation you are facing right now?
2. Is there a habit or influence you need some distance from so that you can stay close to God?
3. How could you celebrate what God is doing in someone else's life this week?

WEEKLY ACTION STEPS

1. **One Step Forward:** Take one step this week toward something you have been putting off.
2. **The Portion List:** Write down three things you are thankful for in your own life and thank God for each one.
3. **A Quieter Screen:** Spend less time on social media this week and notice what changes in your thoughts.
4. **Truth Scripting:** Write out Isaiah 43:16 and keep it where you will see it whenever a door seems closed.

THOUGHT TO CARRY

What looks like the end of the road may be the very place God is making a way, because He always has another move.

WHERE YOU GO FROM HERE

Three weeks ago we began by looking at the weight we carry, and we learned that Jesus takes the heavy end. We then saw that when we open our hands and plant what we have, God multiplies it. Finally, we stood at the Red Sea and saw how God turned what looked like a dead end into a road.

What ties these lessons together is the promise of Isaiah 55:8-9. God's ways are higher than our ways, and even when life does not add up, His math still works.

SAY THESE TOGETHER

Because God carries what I cannot, I will stop holding the whole weight alone.

I will open my hand before I know how everything works out.

I will not call my dead end the end.

Today, I will trust the way God is making.

FINAL REFLECTION FOR ENTIRE SERIES

1. What is the most important insight you have gained over these three weeks?
2. Which lesson spoke most to where you are right now, and why?
3. How will you apply what you have learned in your daily life moving forward?

YOUR NEXT STEP

- Keep meeting together, because growth does not stop when a study ends.
- Choose one person from this group to keep checking in with.
- Bring someone with you to the next study, since someone you know may be waiting for an invitation.

CLOSING COMMITMENT

"Lord, thank You for these three weeks together, and thank You that Your ways are higher than our ways. Help us bring You the loads we carry and trust You to take the heavy end. Give us open hands to plant what we have and faith to trust You with the harvest. And when the road ahead seems closed, help us keep walking, knowing that You are making a way. In Jesus's name, Amen."

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Apopka, Florida | Higher Math eGroup Study