

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

A 4-WEEK STUDY OF MATTHEW 5-7



Welcome to BSF's four-week study of the Sermon on the Mount! We hope God speaks to you through His Word and your group discussion.

Here's how the Bible study works:

- Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
- Discuss your answers with your small group at the end of the week.
- Listen to a podcast teaching on the week's passage.
- Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.
- Repeat!

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others.

Thanks for choosing to study with Bible Study Fellowship!

WEEK ONE

MATTHEW 5:1-16



Focus Verse

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see
your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 5:16



The Sermon on the Mount – Week One

Matthew 5:1-16

Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. How has He provided, answered, comforted, restored, guided, etc.?

Day 2: Matthew 5:1-4

Jesus taught His disciples the kind of character God blesses in a series of statements known as the Beatitudes.

2. What does it mean to be “blessed”? How do the Beatitudes expand this concept for you?
3. How does a right view of God and a realistic view of self contribute to being “poor in spirit”? (See Psalm 51:17 and Isaiah 66:2.)
4.
 - a. What causes you to mourn?
 - b. Read Isaiah 61:1-3; Romans 7:22-24; James 4:8-10. Why does someone who understands forgiveness in Christ mourn over sin?
5. How have you experienced the blessing of being poor in spirit and mourning over sin?

Day 3: Matthew 5:5-8

Jesus taught the countercultural values of God's kingdom.

6. What do you think of when you hear the word “meek”? What do you think Jesus meant by “the meek”?
7.
 - a. What does it mean to hunger and thirst after righteousness?





The Sermon on the Mount – Week One

Matthew 5:1-16

- b. Read Psalms 19:7-11; 42:1-2, 11. How do these verses expand your thinking?
- 8. What is the relationship between receiving mercy and extending mercy?
- 9. How does being “pure in heart” help you “see God”? (See also Psalm 24:4-5.)
- 10. How has God transformed your thinking so that you value and seek the character traits He rewards?

Day 4 – Matthew 5:9-12

Christ called His followers to make peace even when persecuted.

- 11. a. Who do you know that is a peacemaker? What does that person do to promote peace?
 - b. Why are the “children of God” uniquely equipped to be peacemakers? (See 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.)
- 12. a. What does it mean to be “persecuted because of righteousness”?
 - b. How do you respond to challenges, slander, or opposition that comes because you follow Christ?
- 13. What hardships do you face within the circle of influence where God has placed you as His representative?





The Sermon on the Mount – Week One

Matthew 5:1-16

Day 5 – Matthew 5:13-16

Christ identified His followers as salt and light.

14. a. How is salt used, and what does it do?

b. How do Christians function as salt in the world?

15. a. How is light used, and what does it do?

b. What are some ways Christians can be light?

16. Why is the kind of character Jesus described in the Beatitudes necessary to live as salt and light?

Day 6 – Matthew 5:1-16

Jesus' followers think and live differently because they find their identity in Him.

17. Which of the Beatitudes most convicted you this week? Write a prayer asking God to develop it in your life.





The Sermon on the Mount – Week One

Matthew 5:1-16



Matthew 5:1-16

Focus Verse

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” – Matthew 5:16

- The Character of God’s Blessed Ones – Matthew 5:1-12
- The Calling of God’s Blessed Ones – Matthew 5:13-16

Engage

Do you carry a mental image of what Jesus looked like? We sometimes have an idea drawn from children’s Bible stories or classic paintings. Does your mental image include long, blond hair with a glowing halo? A sad, somber expression? Dark, weathered features? In your mind, do His words thunder anger or speak peace and joy? Does the tone of voice you hear in your head fill you with accusation or love? Do you see the face of an authority figure in a white robe? How do you see Jesus?

The Sermon on the Mount offers a colorful, detailed picture of Jesus. In it we hear the heart of the Messiah. We listen to a collection of His core values and see what is most important to Him. These three chapters lay down the brushstrokes to show what Jesus’ heart looks like and how He reveals Himself to His followers. We also get a glimpse of who and what His followers are becoming. In this famous discourse, Christ paints a picture of what it looks like to live a righteous life. **Jesus’ followers think and live differently because they find their identity in Him.** He changes His children from the inside out.





The Character of God's Blessed Ones – Matthew 5:1-12

The Sermon's Setting – 5:1-2

Purpose

Jesus sat talking to His followers high on a hill. Christ had not yet called all 12 of His disciples.¹ People from Galilee followed Jesus to hear Him teach and to seek healing.² By the end of His discourse on the mountainside, the large crowds surrounding Him were amazed.³ **With winsome and strong words, Jesus reveals the standard of righteousness He holds for those who believe in Him.** Christ's inaugural sermon explains how to love others as He loves them. The Sermon on the Mount declared the realities of God's kingdom.

All who fully grasp the love and holiness that Jesus describes as necessary recognize that they "fall short of the glory of God."⁴ Believers can never accomplish this high standard on their own. **Because of this impossibility, the honest person looks to Jesus to meet their desperate need for righteousness.** In this sense, the Sermon on the Mount is a tool to bring us to Jesus. The Apostle Paul described the law as a guardian who shows

us our need for supernatural help and brings us to Christ, the source of all righteousness.⁵

Jesus stated He did not come to destroy Old Testament law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17-20). Both the Old and New Testaments show that God has always desired both inward and outward holiness for His people. Many Israelites, like people today, focused only on outward actions. Jesus traced the outward act to the deeper problem of the heart's motive.⁶ **God looks for righteous outward conduct that flows from a heart of purity, love, and devotion.** God promised the New Covenant. He would place the law and Spirit inside of His children, allowing them to walk more effectively with God.⁷ This was the hope promised by the Old Testament law. Jesus' call to righteousness reflected where the law should take people but also what the Spirit makes possible.

1: Disciples called: Matthew 4:18-22; 10:1-6

2: Large crowds: Matthew 4:23-25

3: Surrounded: Matthew 7:28-29

4: Man falls short: Romans 3:23; James 2:10

5: Guardian: Galatians 3:24

6: Heart's motive: Matthew 15:18-20; Romans 2:29

7: God's law within: Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:25-27





The Sermon on the Mount – Week One

Matthew 5:1-16

Power and Fulfillment

The Sermon on the Mount challenges readers to measure themselves by God's standards and to value what God values. The Holy Spirit convicts believers that they cannot meet God's perfect standards and shows them what to strive for. **This essential power to love and obey comes only through the Holy Spirit.**

The Eightfold Definition of a Happy Life – 5:3-12

How can anyone find happiness? Many would answer, "Money!" Others reply, "Health." Some think success in school will bring happiness. Others place their hopes in a job – or a different job. They may think the answer is marriage – or a transformed marriage. Many desperately desire a child – or for a child to grow up. Humans constantly seek greener pastures and the next horizon. None of these bring lasting joy. God says that something radically different makes a person truly joyful or blessed. **True blessedness comes from new life in Christ and the Christian character that flows from it.**

One way to define the word "blessed" is "to be spiritually fortunate." How can the poor in spirit, the meek, and the persecuted be seen as fortunate? Should not these people be pitied or despised? But Jesus identified them as the truly fortunate: God is pleased with them. **"Blessed" means "happy," but in the truest and most godly sense possible.**

In the first part of His teaching, Jesus shared eight beatitudes, or "blessed sayings." Each one shows the beauty of living in the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. **Together, they paint a picture of living like Jesus.** No one becomes a Christian merely by following the instructions in this sermon. This transformed life comes only to those who receive salvation in Christ. Romans 10:9 verifies that "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." God

Quick Guide to the Sermon on the Mount

Eight Character Traits of God's Blessed Ones – 5:3-12

- The poor in spirit
- Those who mourn
- The meek
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
- The merciful
- The pure in heart
- The peacemakers
- The persecuted

The Calling of God's Blessed Ones – 5:13-16

- They are salt that hinders decay.
- They are light that illumines a dark world.

The Contrast of Christ's and the Pharisees' Standards – 5:17-6:18

Examples deepening the law to its intended depth.

- In principle – 5:17-48
- In practice – 6:1-18

The Conduct of God's Blessed Ones – 6:19-7:12

- Regarding possessions – 6:19-34
- Regarding judging others – 7:1-7
- Regarding prayer – 7:7-11
- Regarding others – 7:12

Four Counterfeits to Avoid – 7:13-29

- The wrong gate – 7:13-14
- The wrong prophet – 7:15-20
- The wrong attitude – 7:21-23
- The wrong foundation – 7:24-29





The Sermon on the Mount – Week One

Matthew 5:1-16



miraculously forms a new nature within believers who put their trust in Jesus.⁸ He places within His followers a desire to put His ideals into practice. He also gives them the power to do so since they cannot do it on their own. In God's power, a Christian can reflect the character this sermon describes.

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit – 5:3

The poor in spirit know they are sinful and feel their great need for God's help. Isaiah 66:2 reveals God's heart: "These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word." **Such people know they will never have the spiritual qualities they need unless God builds those qualities into their lives.** This is the opposite of complacency or self-effort. The Bible repeatedly states that God lifts up the poor in spirit and humbles the proud, complacent, and self-righteous.⁹

The poor in spirit are not filled with self-hatred, believing they have no value or worth. In truth, their worth is measureless in God's eyes. Rather, the poor in spirit cling humbly to the cross of

Christ, recognizing they bring nothing to merit a relationship with a righteous God. **The Good Shepherd makes His followers rich with every spiritual blessing in Christ.**¹⁰ Only the poor in spirit find the security for which the world longs – the kingdom of heaven is theirs. They walk in faith like a child trusts a parent (Matthew 18:2-3).

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn – 5:4

Mourners grieve over their sinful, selfish lives or over righteous suffering. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). **God removes sin's guilt from those who repent and believe.**¹¹

For believers who mourn over individual and collective sin, God promises a coming day when all mourning ceases.¹² **Jesus comforts His people with present strength and future hope.**

Blessed Are the Meek– 5:5

Meekness is not weakness, but instead the opposite of a proud, rebellious spirit. The Creator and Savior of the world described Himself as meek and gentle.¹³ In His humanity, Jesus humbly submitted to and obeyed His Father. **Like their Messiah, meek people seek God's way instead of their own.**

8: New nature: 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:9

9: Proud are humbled: Psalm 107:39-41; Luke 1:52-53; 1 Peter 5:5-6

10: Rich in Christ: Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:4

11: Forgiveness: Psalm 103:12; Matthew 26:28; 1 John 1:7-9

12: Mourning finished: Revelation 21:4

13: Gentle Jesus: Matthew 11:29





The Sermon on the Mount – Week One

Matthew 5:1-16

Meekness that pleases God is actually strength under His control, not a natural human response. God works this quality into His children, often through trials and failure. But Christ's followers know their position as heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.¹⁴ Because they recognize Christ's supremacy, true happiness can fill the meek. They know that God loves them and seeks their ultimate good.¹⁵ **The meek let God defend them rather than seeking retribution themselves.**¹⁶ Godly meekness is active, not passive. This active meekness overcomes evil with good.

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst After Righteousness – 5:6

A baby's first cry expresses need and want. God designed the human soul to want, to desire, to crave. Only God Himself can fully satisfy that craving. Jesus described those who seek God and His will. Our appetites reveal our hearts. Just like hunger and thirst bring us to the table, spiritual hunger and thirst are designed to bring us to Jesus. God both satisfies us and makes us long for more. **Jesus promises complete satisfaction to those who hunger and thirst to live rightly.**

Blessed Are the Merciful – 5:7

God calls those who have received His boundless mercy to extend that mercy to others.¹⁷ Merciful people act in compassion for others who are experiencing sin's misery. They move out in forgiveness, prayer, and love with practical help for those in need. **Because no one deserves mercy, mercy does not harden its heart against the "undeserving."** Christian mercy flows from the mercy first received from God in Christ.¹⁸ Godly

mercy can never be indifferent toward sin. The cross of Christ demonstrates that God is both infinitely merciful and unalterably opposed to sin.¹⁹

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart – 5:8

The pure heart is the heart God has cleansed.²⁰ **A pure heart has an all-consuming focus: to know God, love Him, enjoy Him, and glorify Him.** The pure in heart experience deep fellowship with God and are assured they will see God. Those who believe this precious promise will fight for purity in their own lives, not with their own strength but in the Spirit's power.

The pure in heart will see God today. They find Him in the Scripture they read daily. They look for God's handiwork in daily events and nature. They recognize God's image imprinted upon their neighbor, their spouse, their child, and themselves. They recognize God's Spirit moving in the seemingly mundane and in miraculously life-changing moments.

The pure in heart will see God in eternity. God delivers people from the penalty of sin when they trust Christ for salvation.²¹ The power of sin is broken and personal fellowship with God is restored.²² He will deliver every believer from the presence of sin when Christ returns: "But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2b).

Blessed Are the Peacemakers – 5:9

Apart from Jesus, true peace does not exist. Jesus, the ultimate peacemaker, came to reconcile people first to God and then to one another.²³ Divisions between believers are a distraction, and they destroy the influence of Christians on the watching world. Believers should represent God's power to unite and restore, as Christ Himself dwells within them. Believers experience peace with God and access His presence together. What excuse is there for barriers of opinion, race, gender, class, or culture?²⁴

14: Heirs: Romans 8:17

15: God's love: Romans 8:28

16: God's vengeance: Romans 12:19-21

17: Share mercy: Matthew 18:21-35

18: Compassion: Luke 10:25-37; Ephesians 4:32

19: Cross of Christ: John 3:17-18; Romans 3:26

20: Clean heart: Psalm 24:4; 51:1

21: Penalty of sin: Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-5

22: Power of sin broken: 1 John 1:9

23: Peacemaker: John 14:27

24: Unity in Christ: Galatians 3:28; 6:10; Revelation 5:9-10





The Sermon on the Mount – Week One

Matthew 5:1-16

Peacemaking does not mean to yield to merely appease another's stubbornness or selfishness. True peace boldly points hearts to Christ, reconciling first to God and then to one another.²⁵

When others see believers making peace, they recognize them as God's children. Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted Because of Righteousness – 5:10-12

In this world, Jesus' followers will never escape persecution and trials. Some find themselves or their children the subject of jokes at work or school. A short prayer of thanks may elicit contemptuous intolerance or mocking. Someone in a position of power may make life difficult

because a believer quietly refused to offer a bribe or falsely flatter. Lies and insults may destroy a reputation. Those under religious or political systems opposed to Jesus Christ follow Him under the constant threat of imprisonment or attack. Jesus did not say to stoically resign oneself to persecution. He said, "Rejoice and be glad"! **Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him, and He now gives grace to persevere joyfully.**²⁶

Just as Christ's cross brought redemption to the world, Christians who suffer for Jesus reap fruit in their lives. The unexplainable joy in this life is only a shadow of the overwhelming joy that will wash over believers when they see Him in eternity. **Everyone who shares Christ's rejection now will share His glory then.**²⁷

25: Reconciliation: Romans 12:18; 2 Corinthians 5:19-20

26: Joy through the cross: Hebrews 12:22

27: Sharing in Christ's glory: Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18





The Calling of God's Blessed Ones – Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus gave the Beatitudes in a logical sequence. We cannot help others until God helps us. We influence others when our lives back up what we say. **When the inward life in the Spirit works outwardly with the compassion of Christ, we fulfill Christ's calling to be salt and light.**

Salt of the Earth – 5:13

Most anyone who has enjoyed an entire bag of potato chips values the salty, crunchy tidbits at the bottom of the bag. Throughout history and across the world, salt has served as a flavor enhancer and a preservative. Some ancient cultures recognized its high value and used salt as currency. Chefs know that this savory granule makes everything taste better, and most who have begrudgingly transitioned to a low-sodium diet would agree. A few grains of salt give flavor to food. Even a small amount of salt slows decay. **Believers are the God-ordained salt that adds lasting flavor to life and stops the world's decay.**

Salt's Power

Jesus did not say, "You must be salt!" or, "Try harder to be salt!" **The power to live to please Christ comes from Him.** Jesus merely said, "You are salt." He could very well have followed this up with, "Be what I made you to be." For salt to lose its saltiness, it must cease to be salt.

Salt's Function

Why did the Lord not identify His disciples with honey or sugar? Some Christians so sweeten hard sayings and sugarcoat suffering that they misrepresent God's character. To offend others needlessly is wrong, but it is equally damaging to gloss over the destructive power of sin. Both extremes can harm others who are on a path

to knowing God and growing in Him. **Salt sometimes stings, but it also heals.**

In Jesus' day, disreputable traders would replace salt with other fillers to increase their profit margin. Impurities in salt marshes made pure salt difficult to obtain. The world around us is rotting because it lacks salt. Many great institutions, humanitarian causes, fine art, and noble ideas have sprung from Christian roots but lost sight of their high calling. This can also be true in the life of an individual. **A Christian can sacrifice godly influence by compromising with sin and the world.** Salt loses its flavor by being so diluted with other powders and fillers that it is no longer noticeable.

Salt's Usefulness

If Christians are content to mix only with other believers, they are like salt in a saltshaker – they hold the promise of taste but serve no real use. **Salt adds flavor only when it loses itself in food.**





The Sermon on the Mount – Week One

Matthew 5:1-16

Light of the World – 5:14-16

Jesus is the light of the world.²⁸ **How amazing that He described Christians with those very same words!** In Jesus' illustration, the only way for light not to shine is for someone to purposefully hide it. As part of Christ's body, we reflect His light and extend His presence in the world.

Light dispels darkness. When a light is turned on, it shines on all in the room without limitation or discrimination. A light that dims itself to match the darkness around does no good at all. Jesus

wants His followers to shine brightly as beacons of hope and grace to the darkness in the world.

Jesus' followers think and live differently because they find their identity in Him. In His sermon, Jesus called His followers to understand that His children are radically different, from the inside out. Jesus changes the hearts and focus of those who come to Him. This radical change of character and priorities impacts the people around them. People who live as light in the world will draw attention and give glory to the original light of the world, Christ Himself.

28: Light of the world: John 8:12

Growing in Holiness

The Doctrine of Sanctification

Sanctification – the word that mostly exists in theology books, sermons, and BSF Lesson Notes. But what does it mean? Sanctification refers to a believer's growth in holiness. **Justification is immediate, but God's work of sanctification is gradual.** Christians still live in a sinful world and continue to battle sinful desires and Satan's temptation. Our thoughts, words, and actions become more and more like Jesus as we trust and obey Him. This growth continues until we reach heaven, where we will be completely free from sin and holy like Jesus (Romans 6:1-23; 8:1-17). Until then, God makes the target of righteousness clear and covers us with grace as we grow.

We do not become more like Jesus by trying harder. While we must discipline ourselves to seek and obey God, sanctification is God's work within us (Romans 12:1-2). God has a greater purpose than simply our obedience. He desires to protect us from the harm that comes from sinful choices. God is growing our love relationship with Him to last for all eternity. The Holy Spirit helps us put on new attitudes and actions as we yield to Him. When we live out the Beatitudes – being poor in spirit, mourning over sin, showing meekness, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, granting mercy, being pure in heart, acting as peacemakers, and revealing faith in persecution – we are living in the Holy Spirit's power and not ruled by old sinful desires.

Without understanding sanctification, we blame personality or tendencies for what we should instead recognize as sin. Without knowing that only the Holy Spirit can deliver us, we channel efforts through the ineffective vacuum of willpower. We fail to draw on God's power through the invigorating disciplines of Bible study, prayer, and service. We fail to yield to the Holy Spirit's work. Our spiritual life plateaus, and we wander away from our first love, Jesus Christ.

Conversely, when you understand the doctrine and power of sanctification, you surrender to the Holy Spirit and His divine work. You lean into the opportunities for spiritual growth that God weaves into daily life. You go through hard things longing for God to use them to His purposes. Through faithful prayer, Bible study, fellowship, worship, and the service of God and His people, the Holy Spirit changes your character from the inside out. You lay down the kindling that God sets aflame. **The Holy Spirit puts the Beatitudes into action, equipping believers to live in a way that influences their world.**





Take to Heart

Hold Fast

The attractive face of a celebrity may smile at you from a movie poster. Have you ever seen a snapshot of the same star running errands in sweatpants and disheveled hair? An airbrushed portrait, with makeup and hair professionally in place, does not accurately reflect daily reality. How about you? **When you hold up a picture of your life to the portrait of righteous living in Matthew 5, what differences do you see?**

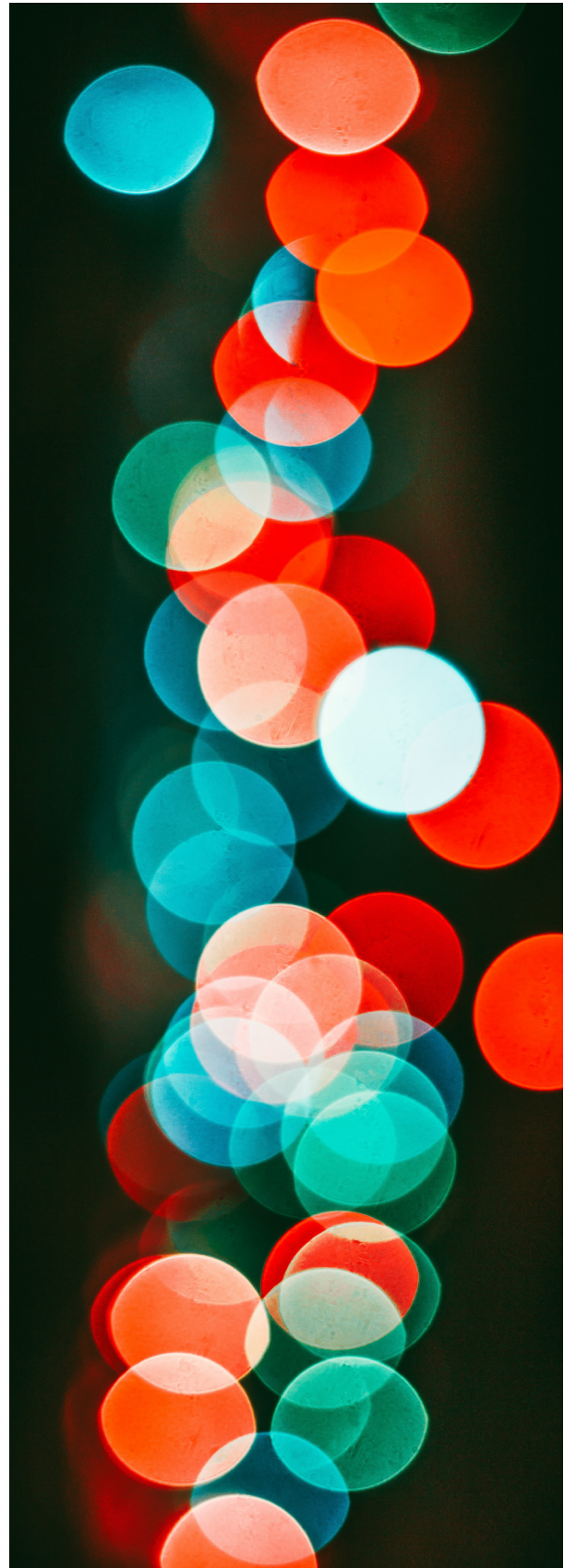
Christ purposefully explained the extraordinary life of the ordinary Christian. **God blesses those who recognize their spiritual neediness, mourn over sin and pain in the world, hunger after deeper holiness, and are persecuted.** Such a life is like His Son's. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians experience deep joy in God and His pleasure. The blessings in the Sermon on the Mount are given in the present tense. Jesus did not say, "Blessed will be the poor in spirit," but "Blessed are the poor in spirit." He desires your truest blessing, your deepest happiness, your fullest joy right where you are – in the life He has given you. Jesus came that you might "have life, and have it to the full."²⁹

Your salt-of-the-earth life is God-ordained to make a difference. **God shows the world His Son through Christians' words and actions.** God plants His people to be salt and light in specific places as His representatives.

Apply It

Spiritual health begins by knowing that we are spiritually bankrupt within our own resources. God prepares us to face our sin and seek Him to supply what we lack. This truth impacts how we treat others. Has God comforted you by removing your guilt for sin and making you pure in heart?

²⁹: Life to the full: John 10:10





The Sermon on the Mount – Week One

Matthew 5:1-16

Do you know you do not deserve God's mercy? Then how can you withhold mercy from another? How often do you refuse to help someone because their own sin caused their problem? Will you ask God to give you His heart and His mind in these matters?

We desperately need Christ's righteousness. Do you desire it as much as your next meal when you are really hungry? The gaps between who you are and who God wants you to be are real. Remember that you are a new creature in Christ. **You can do everything through Christ, who gladly gives you His strength.**³⁰ You can be an agent of reconciliation.³¹ Do you try to make peace between relatives and friends, or do you stir up trouble? How many people in your church do you avoid? Do not resign yourself to a life of broken relationships without considering Christ's power to forgive, reconcile, and transform. When you know peace with God, you can live as a peacemaker. Do you see what God can move you to be? His grace enables you to be what He created you to be.

Are you living a low-sodium spiritual life? Or do you have a godly influence on your family culture, your work culture, your social culture? Do you feel like the one grain of salt in your community? **Since God is the One who made you salt, He also will multiply your effectiveness.** Your circumstances are God-ordained opportunities to bring Jesus' power and beauty to the world. You can add the flavor of Christ's life wherever you go. You must not conform to the world. Rather, as Christ reigns freely over your mind, emotions, and will, He will use you as salt in the world to flavor it with Himself. Scatter salt!

Those who follow Christ bring light to a dark world. Are you a Christian who tries to hide Jesus' light? Or do you draw closer to Him so you might reflect His light even more brightly? **Do you realize the greatness of Christ in you?** As the stars shine and give light on a moonless night, Jesus calls you to shine today. Remember that "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). What dark places, dark hearts, or troubled lives might the light of Christ in you transform? Turn up the light!

30: Everything through Christ: Philippians 4:13

31: Agent of reconciliation: 2 Corinthians 5:19-20



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WEEK TWO

MATTHEW 5:17-48



Focus Verse

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:48



The Sermon on the Mount – Week Two

Matthew 5:17-48

Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. How has He provided, answered, comforted, restored, guided, etc.?
2. What from the notes, lecture, group sharing, or personal study impacted you most in the past week?

Day 2: Read Matthew 5:17-20.

Jesus came to fulfill the Law and call people to true righteousness.

3.
 - a. The "Law and Prophets" refer to the entire Old Testament. What was Jesus' attitude toward the Old Testament?
 - b. How do Jesus' words speak to your experience with and attitude toward the Old Testament?
4. How did Jesus fulfill the Law?
 - a. The moral law? (See Hebrews 4:15.)
 - b. The ceremonial law of Old Testament sacrifices? (See 1 Peter 1:18-21.)
 - c. Old Testament prophecies? (See Luke 24:26-27.)
5. Why must God-pleasing righteousness be different from that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law?





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Two

Matthew 5:17-48

Day 3: Read Matthew 5:21-30.

Jesus exposed the root sins behind murder and adultery.

6.
 - a. In what ways did Jesus expand the concept of murder in verses 21-22? (See also 1 John 2:7-11; 3:10-15.)
 - b. What priority did Jesus establish in verses 23-26? (See also Matthew 18:21-35.)
 - c. How is God leading you to apply Matthew 5:21-26 to your relationships?
7.
 - a. In what ways did Jesus expand the definition of adultery in verses 27-28?
 - b. How do you live out verses 29-30 in everyday life?
 - c. How does this teaching relate to a world that makes it easy to indulge sinful sexual imaginations? (See Philippians 4:8.)
8. How would you apply these principles to your personal battle with sin? (See 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.)

Day 4: Read Matthew 5:31-37.

Jesus calls for faithfulness in marriage and truthfulness in speech.

9.
 - a. What did Jesus say about divorce? (See also Mark 10:1-12.)
 - b. How can believers both advocate for God's design for marriage and share love with those hurt by divorce?





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Two

Matthew 5:17-48

10. a. What did Jesus warn about oaths being needed to validate truthfulness?
- b. In what ways do you find absolute truthfulness a challenge?
- c. What helps you love truth and speak truth?

Day 5: Read Matthew 5:38-48.

Jesus calls believers to forsake revenge and love their enemies.

11. What does Jesus teach about responding to evil and your enemies?
12. a. How do Jesus' commands stand in stark contrast to the ways of the world?
- b. What relationship in your life would change if you obeyed Jesus' words?
13. a. What is your response to Jesus' words in verse 48?
- b. Read Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 4:22-24; and Philippians 2:12-13. What truth in these verses offer perspective on this command?

Day 6: Review Matthew 5:17-48.

Jesus radically transforms believers to obey from the heart.

14. How has the Holy Spirit convicted you or prompted obedience in your life this week?





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Two

Matthew 5:17-48



Matthew 5:17-48

Focus Verse

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” – Matthew 5:48

- Christ Fulfills God-Given Scripture – Matthew 5:17-20
- Christ Explains God-Pleasing Righteousness – Matthew 5:21-48

Engage

As human beings, we love to reduce pleasing God to a checklist. A quantifiable measure of what it takes to earn God’s favor seems desirable. Attending church, avoiding the wrong things, and trying to do the right things works at a certain level. We can experience some sense of security when we appear presentable or at least better than average. Though we try so hard to make our exterior look good, a painful truth lurks underneath. There is more to pleasing God than controlling how we act. Our thoughts, motives, desires, and appetites betray a reality that behavior modification cannot cure. And even when we try, we cannot think and act right all the time. When we measure ourselves against God’s perfect standards, we always come up short.

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount radically redefines what pleases God. True righteousness demands far more than conformity to an external religious system or code of behavior. God’s law was not given to make us proud of our performance but humbly aware that we need a Savior. The desires of our hearts – not just our actions – need pervasive transformation by God’s power. His law must be kept not in part, but perfectly, and Jesus did that. Our only hope is the perfect righteousness of Jesus, transferred to us and growing within us. **Jesus radically transforms believers to obey from the heart.** God’s grace provides what our human efforts cannot as we move toward the goal of becoming more like Jesus.





Christ Fulfills God-Given Scripture – Matthew 5:17

The Beatitudes and Jesus' explanation of the believer's role as salt and light introduce the heart of His sermon. (Matthew 5:1-16) In verses 17-20, **Jesus explains His relationship to the Old Testament and God's intent for His people as He builds His kingdom.** These verses set the tone and state the thesis for this important discourse.

The Fulfillment of the Old Testament – 5:17-18

Jesus Fulfilled the Law – 5:17

Jesus' coming ushered in a new day that fulfilled all God had started in the Old Testament. Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Jesus perfectly kept every demand of God's law. He helped

people understand the true intent of the Old Testament law and prophets. And perhaps most significantly, all of the Old Testament symbolism pointed to Jesus.¹ He is the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."² **Jesus Himself was the fulfillment of the Old Testament.**

The Permanence of Scripture – 5:18

Jesus confirmed the absolute authority and accuracy of the Holy Scriptures. Not the "smallest letter" or "least stroke of a pen" would disappear or fail to be accomplished. Jesus came to earth to begin the completion of all that the Old Testament declared. Matthew 24:35 says it clearly: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Jesus' statement speaks not as much about the 613 stipulations of the law but rather its goal to develop righteousness in God's people. The examples Jesus offers in verses 21-48 illustrate this truth. The accuracy and authority of God's Word provides a firm foundation for life and eternity.

A Call to a True Righteousness – 5:19-20

Not only are the demands of God's law important, but they also define what God honors and declares as righteous. Jesus revered God's Word and warned those who distort or nullify it. God's righteous standards must be upheld with utter perfection, which is impossible for sinful humans. **Jesus warned that no one would enter the kingdom of heaven unless their righteousness exceeded that of Israel's Pharisees and other teachers of the law.** What does this mean? Matthew's readers would have believed that these religious leaders set the highest example of keeping the law. The necessity to exceed their demonstration of righteousness would have been startling.



1: Old Testament points to Jesus: Isaiah 53:2-5; Luke 24:44-45

2: Lamb of God: Exodus 12:1-11; John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19



The Sermon on the Mount – Week Two

Matthew 5:17-48

God requires absolute perfection, not just of external behavior but also of motives and desires. It is not good enough to be better than everyone else; the standard required is to be as good as God. While the Pharisees meticulously lived by a code of behavior that governed their practices, many of them ignored the inward root of sin within the heart. They thought avoiding certain outward actions and doing the right things would be enough.

Jesus set up His thesis: Outward observances and external conformity alone ignore the internal holiness that God requires. Like the Pharisees, we can feel smug and self-satisfied by evaluating ourselves by what we do or refuse to do. Downsizing God's requirements to make them achievable will not work. True righteousness is not defined by a quantity of deeds but by a quality of life.

Doing What Is Right

The Doctrine of Righteousness

Righteousness is not a word used in daily conversation, except perhaps at church. The concept is actually quite important. **A good definition of the word is “right-ness,” which refers to upright moral conduct.** There is a brand of human goodness that may win points on earth because we compare ourselves with other flawed people. Everyone can find someone whose behavior is worse than their own. The challenge with this approach is that the standard against which God measures us is not one another, but Himself. God is perfectly righteous. Human righteousness cannot meet the standard God requires. We cannot even measure up to the standards we set for ourselves.

The Bible is clear, “there is no one righteous, not even one” (Psalm 143:2; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Isaiah 59; Romans 3:10; Revelation 5:1-5). Jesus explained our problem in the Sermon on the Mount. **Even if our external actions uphold a code of behavior that we deem acceptable, our hearts long for things that do not please and honor God.** We cannot produce the kind of righteousness God requires. God understands our limitations better than we do and has provided what we cannot. Through the sacrifice of His own Son, He offers His perfect righteousness in place of our flawed attempts to do right. When we place our faith in Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, the perfect righteousness of Jesus becomes ours.

Most people fail to correctly comprehend the serious problem posed by their lack of true righteousness. Our capacity for self-awareness is flawed because, left to our own devices, we can never properly understand ourselves. When you fail to understand that you cannot meet God's untarnished standards, you await God's judgment with nothing to offer but your flaws. **Living with false confidence that you are basically a good person fails to correctly address the sin that lurks within your own heart.** You are measuring yourself against the wrong standard.

Understanding your own lack of true righteousness is actually freeing. Learning that you can place no confidence in your own contaminated sense of what is right represents a step forward because you can stop trying to be good enough. Once you understand this problem, you can seek a solution. **The true righteousness God requires is provided for you in Christ.** You no longer seek to live rightly in an attempt to earn God's favor. God changes your appetites, so you begin to desire what He desires and love what He loves. True righteousness leads us to a better way to live and relate to others. God's Spirit leads us to follow Christ. He transforms you from the inside out.





Christ Explains God-Pleasing Righteousness –

Matthew 5:21-48

After laying out His overarching truth, Jesus cited six examples to expand the concept of true righteousness beyond external conformity. God's law was never meant to be applied only externally. Exposing the deeper internal sins of thought, motive, and desire was one of the purposes of the law. In His illustrations of this truth, Jesus repeatedly contrasted superficial obedience with true righteousness by declaring: "you have heard ..." and "but I tell you...." He redefined the true essence of the law and emphasized a more effective and authentic way to live.

Jesus' expanded definition of true righteousness pleases God and exceeds human capacity. Jesus is not telling us what we must do to earn salvation but explaining the deeper regenerative heart change that true salvation produces. If Old Testament standards seemed tough, Jesus' deeper probe into the depths of our ambitions and desires is even tougher. This call to

true righteousness should not lead us to run *from* God but to run *to* Him for salvation.³ Christians aspire to the kind of righteousness Jesus describes.

Six Examples – 5:21-47

Anger – 5:21-26

Jesus begins with the sin most people instinctively condemn: murder. Most would heartily agree that anyone who takes the life of another deserves harsh judgment. Jesus does not leave us smug in our confidence that we would never commit such an atrocious sin. Thoughts and emotions that seek the harm of another must be brought to God for cleansing. **Anger, envy, contempt, and hatred are inward sins which can give birth to the outward sin of murder.** Breaches in human relationships are a place where sin readily sets in. Venomous emotions give way to abusive words,

3: The Law leads to Christ: Galatians 2:15-16; 3:10-14





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Two

Matthew 5:17-48

which harm others and can escalate to physical acts. Jesus elevated the danger of these internal sins that are easily dismissed or tolerated even when not acted upon. God judges these sins as serious offenses, putting people in danger of the fire of hell. Even being angry with a brother or sister invites God's judgment.

Broken relationships must be mended.

Believers should seek reconciliation quickly and sacrificially. Going through the motions of worship while ignoring the greater call to seek forgiveness and restoration is disobedience to God. Someone who remembers an unsettled offense should immediately seek reconciliation. No matter who is in the wrong, the believer should make the first move to settle the issue. Verses 25-26 urge Christians seeking legal judgment in the courts to settle the matter themselves with mutual agreement and a desire for peace. A refusal to forgive another's sin means the person is unaware of their own sinful state before God. Clinging to anger and self-righteousness ignores Christ's response of love and self-sacrifice on our behalf.

Human relationships offer both blessings and practical challenges. Inevitable conflict must be dealt with in the power of the Holy Spirit. Harboring anger and bitterness, rehearsing speeches that cast blame, and ignoring conflict provide fertile soil for greater sin. **God seeks to purify our hearts not just from committing overt acts of sin but also to cleanse the innermost desires that cause us to sin.**

Lust – 5:27-30

Jesus opened His next example in a similar way. His listeners knew well the command that they were not to commit adultery. Jesus expanded the danger of this sin beyond the physical act of having sexual relations outside of marriage. Jesus stated that anyone who looked at a woman with lust had already committed adultery with her in his heart. **Jesus condemned not only the physical act of immoral sex, but also the indulgence of**

impure sexual imaginations. Again, Jesus raised the bar to call for purity in the heart, not external restraint that tolerated wrong desires.

Sexual temptation surrounds us in our sex-crazed world. God's standards governing sexual purity seem impossible to obey in today's culture. The prevalence of pornography elevates the acceptance of indulging sensual desires while ignoring the personal harm to victims of terrible exploitation and the societal damage being inflicted. **God cares about the desires of the heart, not just external acts of sin.**

Jesus' example advocated drastic action to avoid sinful indulgence of sexual imaginations. He stated that if your right eye or right hand causes you to stumble, it should be removed and thrown away. It is better to go through life maimed than for the whole body to end up in hell. What did He mean? Take sexual sin seriously and do what it takes to avoid temptation and refuse to indulge sin. In a world that sees sexual freedom as a personal liberty, believers are called to purity of mind and body. Only the Spirit can deliver the mind from evil and purify our hearts.

Divorce – 5:31-32

God instituted marriage as a lifelong commitment between one male and one female. Marriage vows represent a bond, a pledge of integrity to keep your word with God and your spouse. He allowed an exception for divorce only in the situation of marital unfaithfulness. Even then, divorce was not commanded or even desirable.⁴ Biblical marriage expresses the exclusive, permanent, and sacred intimacy that will someday characterize Christ's union with His Bride, the redeemed and glorified Church.⁵ Jesus spoke these words into a society that had made divorce a viable option, much like today. Jewish law allowed a man to give his wife a certificate of divorce for trivial reasons.

4: Divorce: Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:7-9; Mark 10:1-5; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 39

5: Bride of Christ: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; Ephesians 5:28-33





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Two

Matthew 5:17-48



Jesus upheld the sanctity of marriage and importance of the marital bond. **Jesus’ teaching here on divorce exposed the sinful desire to indulge selfish desires and ignore the self-sacrificial love and commitment marriage requires.** He raised the seriousness of this offense. In a world where divorce is common, we must recognize both its damage and God’s grace on those who have experienced its pain. Christians must both uphold God’s clear standards for marriage and love people well. Not all divorced people are responsible for their situation. Those who have been injured by divorce should receive the healing and hope that Christ brings. God’s people should reach out to comfort and help those hurt by divorce.

Oaths – 5:33-37

Jesus recounted that the law taught that an oath made should be an oath kept. **Jesus was not condemning formal promises but calling for honesty of speech that did not require an oath for validation.** When a person is known for speaking the truth, an oath is unnecessary. What happens in the heart that leads a person to stretch the truth or tell a lie? A liar willingly distorts truth for personal gain. Lying is sin.⁶ Every word

we speak is in the presence of God, who will judge every careless word. God Himself is the source of truth. His Word declares truth.⁷ Falsehood and exaggeration reveal a heart that desires to deceive. God calls His children to more than just to stop lying. We are to so love truth that our thoughts and words reflect the purity God desires.

Retaliation – 5:38-42

Old Testament law limited retribution so that the response fit the offense.⁸ The limits of an “eye for an eye” and a “tooth for a tooth” was to keep offended people from exacting disproportional revenge on their offenders. This guideline was given as a basis for law in human government, not a standard for retribution in personal relationships. In the bigger picture, Scripture speaks against retaliation in the form of revenge or a bitter spirit.⁹

Jesus obliterated any justification for seeking painful revenge on one’s enemies. Instead of responding to violence with violence, God’s

6: Lying: Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:11; Proverbs 6:16-17; Ephesians 4:25

7: Truth: Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Psalm 25:5; John 8:32; 17:17; Titus 1:2

8: Eye for eye: Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21

9: Retaliation: Psalm 94:1; Proverbs 20:22; 24:29; Romans 12:17-19





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Two

Matthew 5:17-48

children are called to respond in love when experiencing injustice. Jesus gives examples that call believers to something far more sacrificial than just refraining to return evil. When someone hits you on the cheek, offer them the other cheek as well. When someone sues you for your shirt, also give them your coat. When you are forced to go one mile, go two. Do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. However, this teaching did not prohibit self-defense under attack or standing up for injustice.

What was Jesus teaching? Respecting someone else's rights is noble. But the self-sacrifice of personal rights for someone else goes far beyond a natural human response. **God calls believers to surrender their rights for the sake of the greater good and God's glory.** Accepting personal vulnerability when serving others is commended. This does not mean becoming a doormat, ignoring injustice, or allowing abuse to continue. Loving the other person means holding them accountable for their actions. Jesus Himself set the highest example as He willingly endured intense suffering unto death for the benefit of His children.

Love for Enemies – 5:43-47

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” The Jews knew well the command from Leviticus 19:18, that they should love people within their circle. The second half – the allowance to hate those who stood against you – was not in the original law; it came from tradition. **Jesus enlarged their understanding to declare that the law of love followed the perfect example of God, who loved freely and without restrictions.**

Jesus invited His children to a very different response than hatred toward their enemies. Humanly, we seek to return evil for evil. But how does God desire us to treat our enemies – even those who persecute us for the sake of Christ? What does the Holy Spirit pour into our hearts toward those who mistreat us? Jesus calls us to love and pray for those who abuse and mistreat us.

How is that possible? How can we desire good for those who have treated us badly? **Love and prayer are supreme gifts and are especially powerful when extended to our enemies.**

It is easy to be nice to those who treat us well. We can effortlessly pray blessings on those who demonstrate their love for us. Even unbelievers can do this! God calls His children to a standard of righteousness that far exceeds the dictates of this world. **Only God can so transform our motives, will, and emotions that we genuinely desire good for our enemies.** Praying that God works in the hearts and lives of people who have inflicted evil represents the heart of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave us a prime example of this from the cross when He prayed for His enemies, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). We were His enemies, and He saved us.

The Summary Statement – 5:48

Jesus' explanation and examples of true righteousness are summarized in an astounding statement: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” If Jesus' six examples of true righteousness have not already flattened us, this final statement will. How can flawed humans ever be as perfect as God? On our own, this is impossible. Even believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit cannot think and act in a way that meets God's measure of perfection. **Jesus sets the goal before us, so we can acknowledge our need for God to do what we cannot.**

God does not lower His standard to accommodate our flawed attempts at righteous living. He knows, even better than we do, that we cannot measure up. In love and compassion, He met this standard for us in Christ. Jesus accomplished for us the perfection we could never attain. **Jesus radically transforms believers to obey from the heart.** God's immovable requirement of perfection should not drive us to despair but drive us to Jesus. God provides the perfection He requires. What a God! What a Savior!





Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Matthew 5:3 records, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus explained true blessing and ultimate fulfillment through the Beatitudes. He taught us that God’s rewards are entirely different than what the world values. He called Christians to be salt and light in the world. **This passage offers a glaring contrast between a merely external, superficial attempt to please God and the purity He demands within human hearts.** Recognizing God’s standard reveals our spiritual bankruptcy and shows us why we must pursue Jesus.

Jesus came to fulfill the Law and Old Testament, to usher in its intended purpose. The six examples Jesus offered confirm our need for God’s intervention. Our hearts are full of anger and ill will toward others. We battle evil desires at the root of what we think and do. Self-gratifying attitudes give rise to our sinful actions. We cannot control our actions by self-effort, and the sinful desires within our hearts fall short of what God demands. We cannot “be perfect.” Not even close. **Our actions are flawed because our hearts are not pure.**

This painful reality drives us to Jesus, our only hope. **The unattainable standard Jesus requires makes us more than ready to bask in the beauty of the gospel.** Jesus Christ met God’s standard perfectly. The perfect righteousness of Christ is ours because of His unconditional love and sacrificial death. We boast not in what we do, but in what He has done on our behalf. We strive to obey Him, not to prove we are worthy of His favor, but because we are grateful for His provision. His work in us is not just aimed at cleaning up our behavior but transforming our hearts and impacting our relationships in positive ways.





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Two

Matthew 5:17-48

Apply It

As humans, we love feeling successful. If we can control our behavior within visibly acceptable bounds, we congratulate ourselves. Measuring spiritual success by observable behavior ignores the reality of our sinful thoughts and wandering hearts. Our behavioral checklist is more about maintaining our sense of control and achievement than recognizing our need for God. **The more we realize we cannot please God, the more we know how much we need Christ.** How comfortable are you with feeling needy? Do you know how much you need God? God blesses those who are spiritually poor, not those who boast in their list of accomplishments. God honors those who seek Him and, by His Spirit, seek the things He calls good. Spiritual maturity is not about feeling stronger and more accomplished, though walking with God should bring evidence of life change. We mature spiritually when we

grow in constant dependence on Christ. How will you humble yourself before God today?

Sinful actions spring from sinful desires. **We commonly accept or excuse what we think no one else can see.** God sees what other people cannot. When we acknowledge our sin, we usually deal with only the outward action and not the internal cause of the sin. The Word of God and the Spirit of God probe deep, revealing the thoughts and intents of the heart.¹⁰ When we sin, we reveal what we treasure and who we trust. What is at the root of the personal sin you most readily tolerate? Will you allow the Holy Spirit to reveal the sinful desires that cause you to sin? In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, believers are called to pull down Satan's strongholds in the mind and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. What internal sin is God revealing? Will you allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse your thoughts and renew your mind?

10: Deep into the heart: Hebrews 4:12





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Two

Matthew 5:17-48

Jesus Himself is the pinnacle of all God revealed in the Old Testament. From cover to cover, the Bible points to Jesus. Every temple sacrifice, every symbol, and every prophetic word given to God's people finds its highest and holiest fulfillment in God's Son. The baby born in Bethlehem, dying on the cross, rising from the grave, and coming again should be the focus of God's people and your life.

To walk faithfully with God is to grow in love for Christ. Jesus is constantly pursuing you and always willing to reveal more of Himself to you. Are you growing in an ever deeper understanding and wonder for who He is and what He has done? Countless people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will spend eternity worshipping Jesus Christ. No pursuit in your life is more valuable

than knowing and loving Christ. He is our prize and very great reward.¹¹

This grace we receive gives us God's Spirit so we are now enabled to walk more and more in the righteous ways that God has prepared for us. Romans 6–8 tells how a formerly sinful person can now walk in ways that please God. Part of that is knowing what He asks of us relationally and what He enables by His Spirit. What relationships could you rely on His Spirit to improve for you as you seek to be the person of integrity this passage calls on us to be? Are you willing to trust God by faith and rely on His Spirit for this kind of growth?

11: Christ, our prize: Philippians 3:14

Jesus' Standards Regarding Six Specific Sins

Matthew	Old Testament	Letter of the Law	Spirit of the Law
5:21-26	Exodus 20:13	Murder	Hatred, anger, contempt
5:27-30	Exodus 20:14	Adultery	Lust, impure thoughts
5:31-32	Deuteronomy 24:1	Divorce	Hardness of heart
5:33-37	Deuteronomy 6:13	Requiring oaths to verify truth	Untruthfulness, exaggeration
5:38-42	Exodus 21:23-25	Exacting justice for wrongs experienced	Personal, selfish revenge, and lack of love
5:43-48	Leviticus 19:17-18	Hatred of neighbors	Lack of love to neighbor and enemy

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WEEK THREE

MATTHEW 6



Focus Verse

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.
If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 6:1



The Sermon on the Mount – Week Three

Matthew 6

Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. How has He provided, answered, comforted, restored, guided, etc.?
2. What from the notes, lecture, group sharing, or personal study impacted you most in the past week?

Day 2: Read Matthew 6:1-18.

Jesus called His people to seek God's rewards, not human approval.

3.
 - a. What did Jesus teach in verse 1?
 - b. What is the main point Jesus taught in His three examples?
About giving to the needy:

About prayer:

About fasting:
4. Compare Matthew 5:14-16 with Matthew 6:1-4. What is the difference between Jesus' commands in the two passages?
5. In what ways are you tempted to care more about other people's opinions than what God thinks?

Day 3: Read Matthew 6:5-13.

Jesus taught believers how to pray.

6. How did Jesus describe the kind of prayer that pleases God?





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Three

Matthew 6

7. Jesus offered an example of how believers should pray in vs. 9-13. What does each phrase mean to you?

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

“Give us today our daily bread.”

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

8. How does Jesus’ teaching on prayer speak to you about your prayer life?

Day 4: Read Matthew 6:19-24.

Jesus encouraged storing up heavenly treasure.

9. a. What treasure do people collect or value that can be lost?
- b. What heavenly treasures can a Christian store up that can never be lost?

10. What do the following verses say about treasure:

Psalm 119:72:

Luke 12:15-21:

2 Corinthians 4:17-18:

Philippians 3:8:

1 Peter 1:4-5:





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Three

Matthew 6

11. What two competing masters do people serve?
12. a. What do your priorities, thoughts, and motives indicate that you treasure most?

b. What is God saying to you through this passage?

Day 5: Read Matthew 6:25-34.

Jesus taught that God's children have no reason to worry.

13. List the things Jesus told us not to worry about.
14. a. What examples did Jesus give to prove that God's children have no cause to worry?

b. What is your greatest source of worry that you need to surrender to God?
15. State the truth in Matthew 6:33 in your own words.

Day 6: Review Matthew 6:1-34.

God radically transforms His children's motives.

16. What is the most meaningful life lesson God taught you this week through Matthew 6?





Matthew 6

Focus Verse

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.” – Matthew 6:1

- What Are Your Motives? – Matthew 6:1-18
- Where Is Your Treasure? – Matthew 6:19-24
- In Whom do You Trust? – Matthew 6:25-34

Engage

Unbelievers frequently complain that Christians are hypocrites. In other words, people observe a gap between what Christians claim and how they act. The watching world evaluates the business practices, neighborliness, and general kindness of individual Christians and the Christian community as a whole. Perhaps instead of love, they feel harshness and judgment. When people fail to see what they expect from believers driving in traffic or walking through trials – they call out hypocrisy. While this accusation stings, when we are truly honest, we can all admit that we fail to consistently practice what we preach. **In truth, all believers suffer from a “hypocrisy gap,” the difference between what we know and what we do.**

The change that following Jesus brings to believers is more than skin-deep. God changes what we do by transforming what we desire, seek, and value. God loves us too much to leave us with a smug, self-satisfied version of Christianity. The Holy Spirit works God’s love deeply into our hearts. He cares deeply about who we are at the core, what we love, and who we trust. He confronts our superficiality and hypocrisy because He loves us. **God radically transforms His children’s motives.** This passage asks penetrating questions that call us to wholehearted allegiance to God.



What Are Your Motives? – Matthew 6:1-18

Jesus, heaven's King, explained the nature of His kingdom and the kind of life God blesses. The first section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount focuses on the internal aspects of true righteousness. Jesus expanded the humanly impossible demands of God's law to prove that our only hope is internal transformation by the power of His Spirit. **In this next section, Jesus contrasted religious hypocrisy with the thinking and behavior of those whose goal is God's glory.**

The Premise– 6:1

Jesus confronted the emptiness of superficial religion – the hypocrisy of external expressions aimed at public approval rather than God's pleasure. In verse 1, He offered the principle: "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front

of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." To illustrate His command, Jesus gave three examples of religious acts performed for the wrong reasons. Jesus' concern was, and still is, how and why believers give, pray, and fast.

In all three examples, Jesus described works done for the sake of public recognition that would not be rewarded by God. Those who parade their supposed righteousness to feed their own ego or gain the attention and admiration of others have already received their full reward. Consciously or unconsciously, we are all motivated by rewards. **The rewards people seek reflect their motives.** The Pharisees sought the temporary and fleeting pleasure of public praise and the power that flowed from it. Those who seek people's praise forfeit God's blessing.





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Three

Matthew 6

Seeking God's pleasure and reward is commendable. **A Christian should find satisfaction in pleasing God in ways only He sees.**¹ Moment-by-moment consciousness of God's presence and power changes what the believer values and pursues. A heart that is drawn to God obeys Him out of love and gratitude and receives the immediate joy of His approval and pleasure. Doing the right thing for the right reasons is in itself rewarding. But more than that, everyone will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ. At that time, the life work of every believer will be evaluated. The test of fire will reveal the quality of each believer's works. God will reward even the smallest action done out of love for Him and by faith in His power.²

Three Examples – 6:2-18

Giving to the Needy – 6:2-4

Giving to meet the needs of the poor has always been and remains a responsibility entrusted to God's people.³ Jesus Himself offers both the ultimate example and the reason we should care for others. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Believers can offer not only material help, but also spiritual food that can satisfy people's greatest need.

Jesus explained the kind of giving God honors. The Pharisees sought the honor and admiration of others as they announced their generosity with blaring trumpets in the streets and synagogues. **Jesus called believers to give without fanfare, so that even your left hand does not know what your right hand is doing.** We live in a world surrounded by lonely, needy people. To give, expecting nothing in return, represents the heart of Jesus Himself.

Prayer – 6:5-15

Jesus next called out those who loved to pray in public venues like the synagogues and street corners. Who was the intended audience of these prayers? People, not God. **Those who pray to invite admiration or to appear spiritually superior to others have already received their full reward.** The public attention they received in the moment was all they got. When we strive to pray lengthy, impressive-sounding prayers, we should examine our motives. We should honestly talk to God from our hearts, avoiding prayer clichés that neither mean much to us nor move His heart.

Prayer that pleases God rises from a heart that delights in Him and longs to be in His presence.

Believers humbly make their requests known to God. Our prayers do not inform God of needs of which He is unaware but declare trust in God as Provider. The strength of someone's prayer life is not determined by the beauty or eloquence of public prayers. God loves the simple and genuine cries from His needy children. God is the audience. He hears, He cares, and He acts on behalf of those who humbly seek Him in prayer.

Jesus gave an example of the simple way believers are to pray. This prayer, more accurately called "The Disciples' Prayer," is intended as a community prayer as evidenced by the plural pronouns – our, us, etc. This prayer has five elements that offer a pattern for our prayers.

- ***"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name ..."***

Amazingly, believers become God's own children by faith in His Son and rightly call Him "Father." God is highly exalted in heaven, and His children worship Him in love and awe. His name is *hallowed* – set apart, holy, exalted, and like none other. **Worship and praise acknowledge and honor all that God is.**

1: **Pleasing God:** Psalm 40:8; 2 Corinthians 5:9; Colossians 1:9-10

2: **Judgment test of fire:** 1 Corinthians 3:14-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10

3: **Love in action:** Leviticus 19:10; 1 John 3:17-18





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Three

Matthew 6



- *“... your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

In prayer, we declare submission to God and to His will as our beloved King. We pray for God’s kingdom to come, in the present and in the future. This happens now as people rightly exalt Christ as King and submit as His loyal subjects. We also pray for God’s kingdom to be fully consummated when Christ returns and establishes the unopposed rule on earth that He now possesses in heaven. We long for that day. Believers embrace the perfect will of our Heavenly Father.

- *“Give us today our daily bread.”*
Believers depend on God for daily sustenance, not just for promised eternal treasures. God is a generous Provider. He meets our spiritual needs and also our

physical needs. We live each day dependent on God for that day’s sufficient provisions. As humans, we have nothing that we have not received. God is the source of all we have and all we need.

- *“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

Every person has inherited a sin nature from Adam and committed sin on their own. Our sin represents our greatest debt. Jesus paid that debt on the cross for every sinner who places their faith in His atoning sacrifice.⁴ **We seek God’s forgiveness for our general sinfulness and specific sins.** The Holy Spirit lovingly reveals specific sin so that we may confess that sin and seek God’s deliverance. Those forgiven by Christ are compelled to forgive others, as they have been forgiven.

⁴: Jesus’ sacrifice: 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Three

Matthew 6

- *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”*

Believers must recognize their own vulnerability to temptation and need for God’s deliverance. **God’s children seek His protection and recognize His deliverance from temptation and ultimately from Satan himself.**⁵ Believers can humbly express their weakness and need for God’s sustaining grace. Our confidence is not in our fortitude, but in God’s provision of His strength.

God-honoring prayer is about God and His glory. **We often pray more to ask God to solve our problems than to advance His kingdom.** Jesus’ example helps us know how to pray. We have the privilege of sharing these requests together for one another. God hears His children when they pray.

Fasting – 6:16-18

Fasting was the third area Jesus corrected regarding hypocritical external religion. He warned against showy fasting rooted in pride, intended to draw attention and impress others. Fasting means more than going without food and strict self-discipline. **God-honoring fasting involves voluntarily giving up food, sleep, time, or physical pleasure for the purpose of focusing on God and seeking Him.** Scripture mentions many examples of fasting as an acceptable expression of spiritual devotion.⁶ Jesus and the apostle Paul fasted. The Old Testament Law prescribed a fast on the day of Atonement.⁷ However, fasting should be done quietly before God.

5: Deliverance from temptation: 1 Corinthians 10:13; James 1:13-15

6: Fasting: Matthew 4:2; Acts 9:9; 1 Corinthians 7:5

7: Day of Atonement: Leviticus 16:29

Talking to God

The Doctrine of Prayer

Prayer is an amazing honor offered to every believer. With our feeble and stumbling words, we can speak directly to our Heavenly Father, our Creator. And when we speak, He also listens. And not only does He listen, He also cares. And if that is not enough to amaze us, God acts on our behalf. As we cry out to Him and surrender our requests to Him, God molds our hearts to conform to His will. Because God is omnipresent – everywhere at all times – our access to Him is never limited. Because He is omnipotent – possessing unlimited power – there is nothing He cannot do. God understands our weakness and stands ready to help us (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15).

When you fail to value the incomprehensible privilege of prayer, you ignore the lifeline extended by the God of all grace. You live your life gaining insight from similarly flawed people. You pray selfishly, to impress people, or in desperation, but you do not enjoy the beauty of daily conversation with the God who knows you best. You miss the wonder of a God who delights to spend time with you and wants you to talk to Him.

When you believe that God listens attentively, your conversation with Him can become a steady stream of communion and fellowship. You do not have to hold back your honest questions or doubts; you can pour them out to Him because you know He already knows. Prayer offers a welcoming path to needed confession and an open door to the throne room of Almighty God (Matthew 7:7; John 14:13-14; Philippians 4:6; 1 John 1:9; 5:14-15). Prayer is not a duty, but a delight. Do you adequately marvel at the wonder of prayer? Draw near to God and speak to Him.





Where Is Your Treasure? – Matthew 6:19-24

In Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus warned against the danger of wrong motives and hypocritical, external religion. To seek satisfaction through the praise of others is to lose eternal reward. **In Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus warned of the danger of finding security in possessions and wealth rather than in God.**

Two Treasures – 6:19-21

You will seek what you value most. The location of your treasure determines the desires of your heart. Jesus calls His people to consider what they treasure. **Wealth, possessions, power, and prominence appear as glittering prizes in this world but cannot deliver the satisfaction and security they promise.** Anything you can touch or own in this world can be ruined or lost. Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.”

Jesus offers a better focus. In stark contrast to the world’s treasure that offers only temporary superficial satisfaction, heaven’s treasures are permanent and eternal. Treasures stored up in heaven cannot rot, fade, or be stolen. In a way we cannot fully understand, our obedience to God while living on earth is a treasure stored in heaven. They are not lost through economic crashes, physical decline, or unforeseen disaster. **Jesus calls believers to treasure what God values and to invest in what will last forever.** A probing question arises from Jesus’ teaching: “Where is your treasure?”

Two Kinds of Vision – 6:22-23

Jesus spoke of the eye here to represent a person’s perception, or the way they “see” everything. This “eye” is like a window through which light enters to illuminate the whole house. Light coming through a clear window brings clarity.

Light diffused through a clouded or warped window distorts reality. **When a person’s values and life goals are informed by the frivolous and temporary thrills of this world, darkness reigns.** Without God’s light, the whole body is encompassed by great darkness.

Only when a person draws their life perspective from God do they find clarity and a meaningful purpose. **We must look to God to put life in this world into proper focus.** Jesus offered this illustration between a call to value eternal treasure over passing pleasure and a call to serve God, not money. A singular focus on God defines what really matters now and for eternity.

Two Masters – 6:24

Just as two treasures vie for your values, two masters compete for your loyalty. Who are these competing masters? Jesus states it clearly: **“You cannot serve both God and money.”** You were created to serve a master, and Jesus stated that it is impossible to serve two competing masters. Your heart’s devotion cannot be divided. You will love one master and hate the other.

Money represents this world’s treasure. People value the acquisition of possessions and the affirmation those belongings bring from others. Money and the things money can buy easily become an idol. Without realizing it, we can easily buy into the wrong thinking that “if I had just one more thing, life would be perfect.” Wealth and possessions are not wrong in and of themselves. Many Christians use their God-given resources to magnify His name and promote His kingdom. The caution is that we do not let our possessions own us. **The truest and deepest satisfaction is not found in worldly possessions. Money must not master God’s people.** God Himself is our treasure, our focus, our master, and our very great reward.⁸

8: God, our reward: Genesis 15:1; Numbers 18:20; Psalm 73:25-26; Matthew 13:44-45



In Whom do You Trust? – Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus gave instructions about seeking the right reward and treasure. But what about daily necessities? **The daily provision of practical needs represents a call to faith in God, our Provider.**

The Premise – 6:25

Jesus commands believers not to worry: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?” **To worry about life’s provisions is to fail to believe God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do.** The Creator and Sustainer of the universe owns everything, controls everything, and provides everything. Anxiety over daily needs reveals a lack of belief that God is loving, caring, and able to do anything to help. Because worry

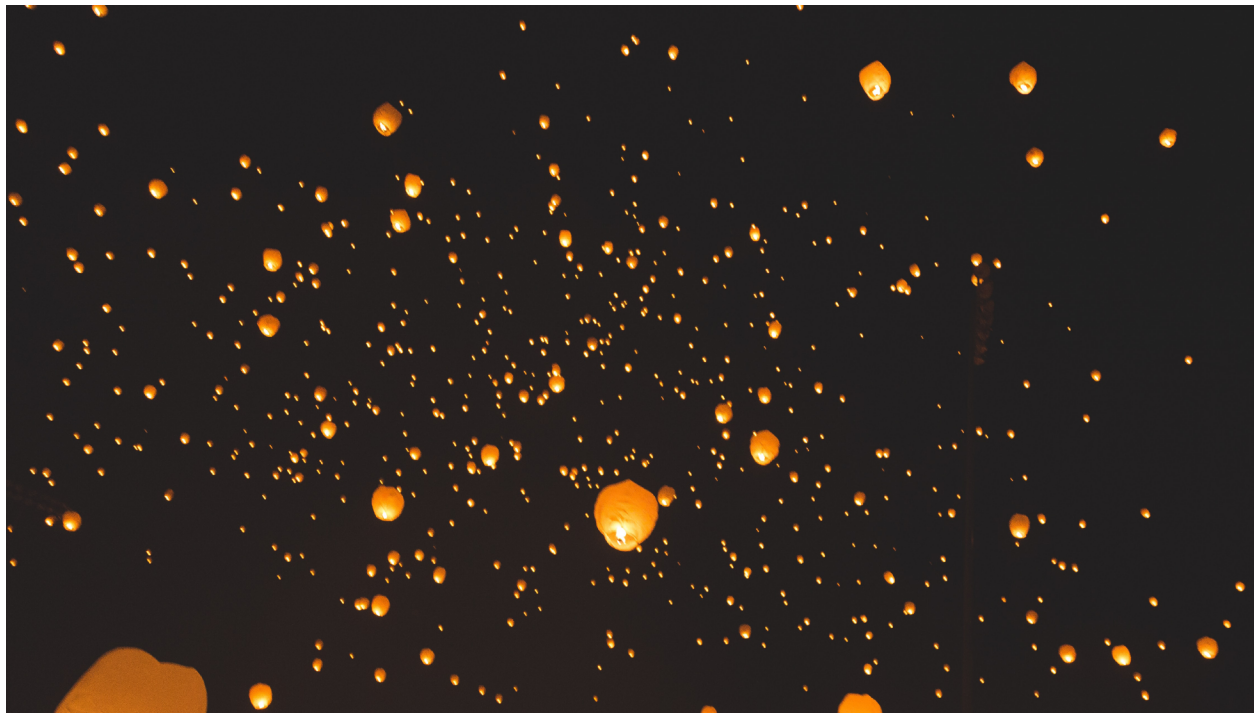
is such a common response to life’s pressures, we often fail to recognize its seriousness. We easily justify worry and fail to see it as a sin against God.

When we worry, we fail to stand on truth.

We magnify the challenges and imagine worst-case scenarios. To focus on our helplessness and hopelessness is to ignore the truth of our status as God’s children. The Psalms teach us to not suppress these real emotions but to bring them honestly to God. Jesus has already taken care of our biggest problem – God’s wrath against our sin. He has opened the way of a renewed relationship with God.

The Examples – 6:26-32

Jesus knows we most often worry about daily provisions such as food, clothing, and shelter. He pointed to God’s faithful care for creatures far less important than people created in His image.





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Three

Matthew 6

God feeds the birds, who do not plant gardens or store away food and never worry about their next meal. He clothes the flowers with buds and blooms more glorious than the regal splendor of King Solomon, the richest king ever. God clothes the grass of the field, which springs up only to be cast into the fire. If God invests this kind of care in His creation, won't He also feed and clothe you?

How does Jesus' promise apply to Christians who have died lacking food, clothing, or shelter? The argument here is that God's care for birds and flowers presupposes His care for His people. This does not mean that Christians will never go hungry or lack proper shelter. His care goes beyond physical needs. God may give the comfort of His presence in famine or through exposure to the elements. He may provide peace while facing death. **God's care for His children is certain although experienced in a variety of ways.** Therefore, we must not worry.

Worry will not add a single hour to your life. In fact, worry contributes to a multitude of health problems. Worry seizes our minds and puts our focus on our circumstances, not God. People in this world who do not know God live a frenzied life running after things only He can provide. This is not the way God intends His children to live. God loves you more than birds or flowers. There is more to life than a meal or an outfit. **To worry over these temporal life issues is to forget that God is our Provider and this world is not our home.**

The Security of Trusting God – 6:32b-34

Jesus offered three faith-filled solutions to the real problem of worry.

God Knows Your Needs – 6:32b

How can you overcome worry? How does anyone live life in a world of uncertainty without anxiety or stress? You must remember who God is and what He knows. God is your heavenly Father,

who holds Himself responsible for your welfare. He knows what you need. When worry fills your mind, stop and meditate on truth about God.⁹ If you need shelter, He knows that. If you need food or clothes, He is aware. **The omniscient, omnipotent God can be trusted with your needs.**

Seek God's Kingdom – 6:33

Intentionally focus on His kingdom, not your kingdom. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Jesus encouraged believers to make God's rule and reign their life focus. When people on earth recognize and relax under the faithful care of their King, they know true security and rest. **Nothing in this life is more important than living in surrender to the King who met your greatest need and can be trusted with everything else.**

Leave Tomorrow in God's Hands – 6:34

Worry centers on the future – unresolved issues beyond our control. This section of Jesus' sermon ends with a very practical admonition. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." While good planning for the future is necessary, you cannot do anything today about tomorrow. Believers should not worry about tomorrow's trouble but find contentment in God's daily provision of grace. Many sincere Christians battle against anxiety and worry. **Seeking God and His kingdom brings the only real security in life.** Believers should share their concerns and find strength and encouragement in fellowship with one another. Lamentations 3:22-23: "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

The change God brings to a believer's life runs deep. **God radically transforms His children's motives.** The new life of Christ starts in the heart.

9: Right thinking: Philippians 4:8





Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Jesus exposed the superficiality of external religious acts that ignore the heart. External demonstrations promote self-righteousness and human pride. Those who seek people's admiration forfeit God's blessing. Acts of service, prayer, and giving in an attempt to win the affirmation and attention of others do not honor God. The internal motivation behind our outward acts matters. **God makes His pleasure and reward the motivation of the redeemed heart.** What are your motives?

Christians living with their feet on earth struggle to fully embrace the values of heaven. The contagious pursuit of this world is the constant allure of "more." We can wrongly seek security in bank accounts, possessions, and human comfort. In the end, these earthly treasures will crumble. **The highest and best motive for life is to invest in treasure that will stand the test of eternity.** The devotion of your heart will follow the location of your treasure. The counterfeit treasures of this world will rot and decay. The real treasure of eternity will endure. Where is your treasure?

Your worry and anxiety reveal what you treasure and trust. The believer can live a life free from worry because they can communicate their burdens to God and trust their heavenly Father with what they need. Your greatest need has been met by Christ. God created the world and cares for its creatures. There is no need to worry because God is your Father. Who do you trust?

Apply It

Superficiality and hypocrisy are easier to recognize in others than in ourselves. Both individually and corporately, we like to believe in a better version of ourselves than we know to





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Three

Matthew 6

be actually true. We would rather do things that make us feel better about ourselves than do the hard work of opening our hearts to God. We should allow God's purifying light to penetrate the dark corners of our motives and values. God is not fooled by a dressed-up exterior. He knows what really motivates us. He knows when we care more about the perception of others than about honoring Him. But there is good news. God is not fooled by skin-deep goodness, but neither is He repelled by our flimsy attempts to look holy. **God will lovingly lead His children to the kind of heart holiness that only He can provide.**

What situations tempt you to try to appear spiritually strong? In what area of your life do you tolerate a "hypocrisy gap" – a place where your actions do not line up with the truth you know? Are you doing the right things for the wrong reasons? Does your church demonstrate God's character to your community? God wants to purify our motives and desires, both as individuals and as a community of believers.

The material world of sights, sounds, and smells feels more real than the unseen realities God declares to be true. In our humanness, we wrongly seek security in what we can eat, wear, and buy. God has a better way. **God's pleasure and His Kingdom outshine the brightest jewels on this fleeting earth.** Does your heart yearn for the ultimate reality of God Himself? God will satisfy

your deepest hunger with food that is not of this world. He can be trusted to provide faithfully for His children. His provision cannot be quantified in cash, cars, or commodities. Spiritual treasures last forever. How are you foolishly mesmerized by the appeal of money, possessions, and earthly security? Are you trusting in what will not go with you into eternity? Pour yourself into God, His Word, His kingdom, and His people.

Hard things seem to lurk around the dark corners in front of us. As humans, we succumb to anxiety over what we cannot control. In truth, we cannot guarantee even our next breath. If you are burdened with worry, take a walk outside. Look at the birds building nests, feeding their young, and flying effortlessly in the sky. Pick some flowers and take in the vibrant colors and endless varieties that display creativity and beauty that fashion designers cannot replicate. Your value to God exceeds any of these things. The God who feeds baby birds will meet your needs. The Creator, who even makes weeds bloom with breathtaking color, will give you the clothes you need. **Though you often wrongly define your wants as needs, God can be trusted to supply what you truly need.** What do you worry about? What do you think about when your thoughts wander? You cannot worry and trust God at the same time. Will you trust God for the grace you need for today?

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WEEK FOUR

MATTHEW 7



Focus Verse

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you,
for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

Matthew 7:12



The Sermon on the Mount – Week Four

Matthew 7

Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. How has He provided, answered, comforted, restored, guided, etc.?
2. What from the notes, lecture, group sharing, or personal study impacted you most in the past week?

Day 2: Read Matthew 7:1-6.

Jesus taught about humility in judgment.

3.
 - a. What does Jesus mean by “do not judge” in this passage?
 - b. What is the difference between the kind of judgment Jesus describes here and wise discernment? (See Romans 12:2; Philippians 1:9-10; Hebrews 5:14.)
 - c. How do believers help one another in their struggle with sin in a healthy and loving way? (See Galatians 6:1-5; Ephesians 4:2.)
4. Why is Jesus' call for a believer's self-examination so important in dealing with someone else's faults? (See James 2:12-13.)
5. In what way are you prone to judge others harshly? How do Jesus' teachings help you?

Day 3: Read Matthew 7:7-12.

Jesus encouraged disciples to pray to their Father.

6. What are the three descriptions of prayer in verses 7-8, and what does God promise when you pray this way?





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Four

Matthew 7

7. a. What does Jesus teach us about God the Father with His illustration of an earthly father?

b. How does God work on behalf of His children? (See Romans 8:28, 32.)

8. a. Think about verse 12. What does it look like for you to be as sensitive to others as you would be to yourself?

b. How does loving others as you love yourself summarize all the teachings of the Law and the prophets? See also Matthew 22:34-40.

Day 4: Read Matthew 7:13-20.

Jesus warned His listeners against spiritual counterfeits.

9. a. What was Jesus teaching with His illustrations of the narrow and wide gate? (See also John 14:6; Acts 4:12.)

b. Why is this truth so distasteful to many people?

10. a. What distinguishes true prophets from false prophets? (See also John 15:16 and Galatians 5:22-23.)

b. How does the warning in verses 15-20 add balance to what Jesus taught about judging others in verses 1-6?

11. What warning or conviction does this passage have for you today?





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Four

Matthew 7

Day 5: Read Matthew 7:21-29.

Jesus contrasted wise and foolish choices.

12. a. What truth or lesson did Jesus teach in verses 21-23?

b. How does this truth impact you?
13. a. How do people build their lives upon the true foundation? (See Isaiah 28:16; 1 Corinthians 3:11.)

b. In what ways do people build their lives upon sand?
14. How does God's truth help you withstand the storms of life?
15. What really reveals the foundation your life is built upon?

Day 6: Review Matthew 7.

Godly wisdom requires humble self-examination, persistent prayer, and constant discernment.

16. a. What was your greatest discovery and challenge while studying the Sermon on the Mount?

b. How may your group pray for you in light of this challenge?





Matthew 7

Focus Verse

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” – Matthew 7:12

- Judge Humbly – Matthew 7:1-6
- Pray Passionately – Matthew 7:7-12
- Discern Wisely – Matthew 7:13-29

Engage

Challenges in life expose what is inside us. Pressure reveals what we treasure and trust. How do you respond when your need for God is displayed to yourself and others? These moments that offer a diagnostic test of our inner reality are not only painful, they are also helpful. God’s Spirit develops spiritual fortitude within us by and through the course of daily life. **Spiritual muscle develops in those who regularly depend on God for needed wisdom.** What are the hidden spiritual muscles – the virtues and strengths – that allow a believer to demonstrate Christlike character in their relationships? This final section of the Sermon on the Mount describes the spiritual strength that transforms the way we relate to God and the people around us.

Jesus offered a heart-to-heart perspective on how to judge, pray, and interact with others. He taught how to identify both false teachers and counterfeit disciples and to build a life that can withstand turbulent times. Because Jesus’ disciples enjoy the lavish goodness of their gracious Heavenly Father, they can extend grace to others. Just as a flourishing tree produces life-giving fruit, a wise and discerning heart puts Jesus’ teaching into practice. **Godly wisdom requires humble self-examination, persistent prayer, and godly discernment.**



Judge Humbly – Matthew 7:1-6

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount by describing the blessedness of life in His kingdom. He offered a practical explanation of what it looks like to please God both inwardly and outwardly. In chapter 6, Jesus called His people to find complete security in the love of God the Father for His children. **Now, in chapter 7, Jesus explains how His people should live and relate to others.**

Examine Yourself Before Judging Others – 7:1-5

Verses 1-2 teach that judging results in being judged. “Do not judge” means “do not condemn.” When we wrongfully think we can evaluate others in a critical and unforgiving way, that same manner of judgment will be applied to our

motives and actions. **Any human standard of measurement falls woefully short of God’s righteous judgment.** Only when we understand the gracious mercy of Christ can we evaluate others through the prism of God’s extravagant generosity. There is a difference between judging others wrongly and exercising wise discernment.

Jesus explained the problem of a self-appointed judge who condemns others without first being self-critical. He continued to contrast empty, external religion with a heart that pleases God. Israel’s religious leaders meticulously followed and added to the demands of the Mosaic law. They sought to exalt themselves and condemn others.¹ Self-righteous judgment criticizes a “speck” in another’s eye while ignoring a large “plank”

1: Pharisees’ self-exaltation: Matthew 5:17-48; 6:1-18





The Sermon on the Mount – Week Four

Matthew 7

in your own eye. **Jesus equated judging with looking for faults and blemishes in others while excusing personal flaws.** This attitude overlooks both personal sinfulness and God's great mercy.

A healthy Christian community lovingly holds people accountable to obey God's commands.² Spiritual discernment and sensitivity are part of spiritual maturity. Discernment involves applying godly wisdom in practical matters. **When we gently help people face their sin with appropriate humility regarding our own faults, we teach wise discernment and bring loving accountability.** Those who critically judge others fail to show mercy or understand the difficulties or struggles another person may face. The way another child of God serves Him may also simply be different and not wrong.³

Could it be that the sin that most irritates you in someone else is one with which you also struggle? **Self-righteousness and criticism always cloud spiritual vision.** Those harboring a critical spirit are powerless to help others change. Only God can correctly judge the motives and intentions of the heart. Jesus calls His children to look at others with God's love.⁴ Only when we love others as He does can we gently help remove the speck and restore another's vision.

Many quote Matthew 7:1 and interpret the direction as: "Ignore the speck. Who are you to judge?" Jesus is not telling us to overlook another's sin or to refuse correction when a fellow believer points out sin in our own lives. Rather, this passage encourages believers to consider their own sin before pointing out sin in others. **Believers must rightly understand their own humble dependence on Christ's righteousness for their salvation.** This is the foundation for relating to others.

Discern Wisely Before Sharing Spiritual Truth – 7:6

Remaining centered on truth requires avoiding error. Jesus commanded us not to condemn others and harbor a critical spirit. But He also commanded us to make wise spiritual judgments. He warned believers not to throw priceless treasures under the feet of dogs and pigs. Pigs were seen as ritually unclean animals, unworthy of precious things. The animals mentioned here were not cute pets or tame farmyard animals. These wild and vicious scavengers would even attack those who attempted to offer food. Many other references in Scripture equate false teachers with these same ferocious animals.⁵

In Jesus' example, pigs trample pearls simply because they cannot recognize their value. **Someone who does not yet recognize Jesus' deity will mock the tenets of Christian faith.** What this person most needs is the basic truth that Jesus is the only Savior of the world and of their heart. This truth should be offered, but Jesus instructed His disciples not to continue in a place where people consistently rejected their words. The apostles followed this pattern as well.⁶ We should recognize that someone's openness to God's truth may be an issue of God's timing rather than a call for us to totally disengage or separate. Often, a relational bridge must first be built before addressing the precious things.

This does not mean that believers should regard anyone as hopeless or beyond the reach of the gospel. Saul of Tarsus watched and approved as Stephen was stoned to death. No one dreamed that this hate-filled Pharisee would ever be anything but a persecutor of God's people.⁷ If God saved Saul and made him the apostle Paul, and if God saved you with all of your sin, there is hope for the worst sinner.⁸

2: Loving restoration: Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-5

3: Different service: Luke 9:49-50; 1 Corinthians 9:20-22

4: Love one another: John 13:34-35

5: Foes of God: Matthew 15:26; Philippians 3:2; 2 Peter 2:2-3:3

6: Dismiss consistent rejection: Matthew 10:14; Acts 13:46

7: Paul's former life: Acts 7:59-8:3

8: Hope for all: 1 Timothy 1:15





Pray Passionately – Matthew 7:7-12

Persistence in Prayer – 7:7-8

Jesus used three verbs to describe prayer: ask, seek, and knock. Each of these words expresses persistence and sincerity in prayer. **We are to keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking with passion and perseverance.** God sometimes causes His children to wait for His answer to grow faith, deepen desire, and await His perfect timing. These verses also offer three descriptions of God's faithfulness to hear and answer us when we pray. Those that pray in faith receive answers from God and see Him open doors before them. Prayer is an amazing privilege offered to God's children.



Jesus' principles of kingdom living impact human relationships. God is our good and perfect Father who seeks to care for His children in ways that far surpass our sinful, earthly fathers. **God wants us to approach Him like a dearly loved child approaching a good, loving parent.** In His wisdom, He gives us many things we do not ask for and withholds things we foolishly request. In the end, we have to trust God to give us what we need. A "no" does not mean God is holding out on you, but sometimes "no" means "that is not best for you." He gives us what we really need.

Confidence for Prayer – 7:9-11

Jesus directs us to pray boldly. A good earthly father delights in spending time with his children and fulfilling their needs. Jesus reveals that believers should come confidently to God, knowing that their Father loves to give good gifts to those who ask. He has unlimited resources and infinite wisdom. He will satisfy their deepest heart longings for closeness, spiritual growth, and discernment.

His cherished children can have joyful confidence that their Father always seeks their best interest.⁹ In Romans 8:32, Paul asked this encouraging question: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" The Father in heaven delights to give good things to those who ask Him.

Generosity in Relationships – 7:12

Jesus taught that those who have received grace should be generous in the way they evaluate and respond to others. He explored the generosity of a loving heavenly Father who loves to give good things when His children ask. So how should believers, so blessed by God's generosity, respond

9: Father's good will: Psalm 84:11; Romans 8:28; James 1:17



The Sermon on the Mount – Week Four

Matthew 7

to others? Jesus summed up His teaching with a principle so revolutionary that it has been named The Golden Rule. This command not only connects all the sections of Matthew 7, it also sums up the Sermon on the Mount itself. Can anyone ever hope to fulfill the depth and breadth of His commands? **Jesus revealed that the answer is to see that all of God's commands flow from this one principle of love.**

Jesus said, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." In Jesus' words, the greatest law is to love God. The entire Old Testament Law and the teaching of the prophets revolved around this principle of love for God

and love for people. **Without love for God, there can be no true love for others.** We put true love for God into action when we are as sensitive to others as we would be to ourselves.

God Himself designed humanity's deep and intrinsic desire to love and be loved. Our Father shows His great love and concern for us when we ask Him to help us love. We cannot love as perfectly as He does. **He delights to answer us when we ask for the desire and power to do for others what He has done for us.** God pours out His love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit¹⁰ so we can love others with the same lavish love. Golden behavior, rooted in a deep love for others, flows out of a heart connected to the Father.

10: Love through the Spirit: Romans 5:5

A Good Father

The Doctrine of God the Father

God is our Father and He is the King of eternity. We often draw our images of God, who is perfect, from our imperfect earthly fathers, who are made in the image of God and yet marred by sin. **But God, our Heavenly Father, is always good, always wise, and always loving.**

God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, is the Creator, Sustainer, and Judge of all things. Jesus revealed that He and His Father are one (John 10:30) and intimately referred to God as "my Father" (Matthew 7:21; 11:27; 26:53). He is the Father of all who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:3-5). **As believers, God gives us His Spirit, adopts us into His family, and makes us His children.** He has a loving relationship that lasts forever with every believer. He speaks to us personally through His Word, the Bible, and we speak to Him in prayer. The Sermon on the Mount reveals the wonder believers experience because God is their good Father (Matthew 5:16; 6:6,8; 7:11).

If you fail to recognize the tender love of God the Father, you miss the greatest blessing that can be known. Dismissing the existence of God or seeing Him as only a distant uncaring monarch is to live life without realizing the purpose for which you were created. You were created in God's image and designed to know and love Him. A life without God only offers passing pleasure and uncertainty.

God is a loving Father who delights to give good gifts. The wonder of being known as His child and being invited not only into His throne room but also into intimate fellowship with Him defies human description. To recognize how He loves, protects, cares for, and trains you as His beloved child gives stability and purpose to life. He listens when you pray and delights to answer when you ask, seek, and knock. He extends the nail-scarred hand of His own Son so that you may run into His open arms. What great love! What a good Father!





Discern Wisely – Matthew 7:13-29

Jesus warned His listeners against spiritual counterfeits as He began His conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. He defined three glaringly contrasting choices that determine life's direction and eternity's destiny:

- Will you enter the narrow road or the broad road? (7:13-14)
- Will you follow a counterfeit or Jesus? (7:15-23)
- Will you build on the wrong foundation or the right foundation? (7:24-27)

Choose the Right Road – 7:13-14

Jesus described two gates – one is wide and the other is narrow. The wide gate leads to a broad road and destruction. The small gate leads to a narrow road and life. Only a few find the narrow gate. The way of the minority is the right way; the majority choose the wrong road. What is He saying? Jesus is speaking of the exclusivity of the gospel and the fact that most people choose the easier, well-traveled road that leads to destruction. Jesus Christ identified Himself as the gate through which people must enter to be saved: “... whoever





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enters through me will be saved.”¹¹ He disclosed, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”¹²

Jesus taught that there is only one way to come to God. The amazing truth is not that there is only one way but that there is *a* way. God, in His gracious love, makes this one way available to all who enter through the gate that is Jesus. Rejecting the way of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ equals purposefully choosing a path leading to destruction.

Discern the Right Teaching – 7:15-23

Recognize the Right Prophets – 7:15-20

Many present their own opinions as truth and attribute their words to God. We often think of prophets as those who foretell the future. However, the Bible primarily speaks of prophets as those who “tell forth” God’s truth, who interpret Scripture for others to hear and apply. How do you recognize false prophets? They ignore the seriousness of sin. “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14). False prophets speak their own words instead of God’s words. “... The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. ... They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds” (Jeremiah 14:14). Jesus warned that false prophets would look like sheep within His flock, but He called them out as ferocious wolves. God gave us His Word to help us discern what is false and what is true.

Jesus said, “By their fruit you will recognize them.” The fruit a tree bears tells us what kind of tree it is. Thornbushes and thistles do not produce grapes and figs. A bad tree cannot bear good fruit. **God’s people will be recognized by**

the good fruit He produces in their lives. They teach the good news of Christ and reap the lasting fruit of changed lives.¹³ When a person brings others to God through the gospel, the fruit from Christ Himself cannot be counterfeited.¹⁴ Like a flourishing tree that shares its bounty with hungry visitors, a believer’s life gives refreshment and nourishment to those around them.

Recognize the Right Disciples – 7:21-23

Jesus offers a frightening description of people who will be surprised that they will not be allowed to enter heaven. On a coming day, many will claim to have said the right words and even prophesied and performed miracles in Jesus’ name. The shocking response, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” awaits many who have false confidence of their place in God’s kingdom. **Good words and good works do not stamp your passport to heaven.** Correct doctrine, memorized Scripture, and theological knowledge alone are not the same as saving faith. Those who enter God’s Kingdom pass from death into life through true faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁵ Intellectual or emotional agreement with the gospel, a decision to “do better,” or even a formula based on Scripture do not constitute new birth. True faith requires a deliberate commitment to trust God’s conditions of salvation.

Commitment to love God and obey His will involves more than regular church participation or serving as a church official, small group leader, or missionary. Jesus sees through outward appearances. He knows those who belong to Him.¹⁶ Jesus graciously reveals that “only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” will enter His kingdom. **The will of the Father is that men, women, and children believe in Jesus, whom God sent.**¹⁷

11: The gate of Jesus: John 10:9

12: Jesus is the way: John 14:6; Acts 4:12

13: Lasting fruit: John 15:16; Romans 6:22; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Timothy 6:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:13-4:2

14: Fruit in Christ: John 15:4-5

15: Death to life: John 5:24; Ephesians 2:1-10

16: Belonging to the Lord: Matthew 25:11-12; 2 Timothy 2:19

17: Believe the One: John 1:12; 6:29





Build on the Right Foundation – 7:24-27

Jesus understood carpentry and offered a practical illustration of true faith. He introduced two builders, both diligently constructing their houses. The wise builder chose a firm foundation. He represents the person who hears Jesus' words and has a deep desire to act on them by building his house upon the Rock.¹⁸ **When the inevitable storms of life came, the house on the rock stood firm.**

By contrast, the foolish builder constructed his house on sand. **The foolish builder represents those who hear Jesus' words and know God's conditions for salvation but do nothing about them.** This foolish builder spent great time and resources to construct a life that looked good. But the actual structure was placed on sand, ready to fall with a great crash when the winds blew and the water rose.

For a while and from the outside, both houses looked similar. A moral life of good works looks good on the outside, but one day a storm comes. It may be a hurricane of sudden trouble, inner turmoil, or outside pressure. It may be the tsunami of death and the eternal judgment that follows. **When the storms of life hit, one house stood strong and resilient, and one fell with a great crash.**

A life of genuine faith produces fruit. Deep gratitude for God's grace and goodness spills over into passionate faith-filled prayer. Intimate personal knowledge of God and truth brings wisdom that discerns truth from error. Humility and dependence on God are the trademarks of genuine believers. **Godly wisdom requires humble self-examination, persistent prayer, and godly discernment.** Every aspect of life is impacted by the supernatural life-giving power of Jesus.

¹⁸: Christ the Rock: 1 Corinthians 3:11; 10:4



Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Matthew 7 describes how people who have received God's grace operate in this world. Believers can scarcely afford to be judgmental toward people who sin and fail in the same ways they fail themselves. Instead, they must recognize God's lavish generosity and seek the eternal welfare of others. They must so love the truth that falsehood holds no allure. **Any choice in life that leads away from Jesus does not appeal to God's child.** He is the way, the truth, and the life.¹⁹

Life's biggest travesty would be to build, to craft, to live, and to love on a foundation of sinking sand, never recognizing until too late the need for a foundation of rock. Christ's words graciously call to both the wise and the foolish builders. "... He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."²⁰

Those whom God saves act on His words. The foolish builder ignores Jesus' call to repent. The wise builder comes to Jesus to receive eternal life.²¹ The foolish person ignores the warnings, procrastinates on a response, or compensates for a poor foundation with an impressive façade. The wise person exercises diligence before the storm clouds gather and builds their house on the Rock.

A believer rooted in Christ thinks and lives differently than other people. The transformation Jesus brings is not superficial. Pleasing God involves more than a showy display of rituals. God is after our hearts. He is not content for us to feel self-satisfied. The Sermon on the Mount raises the demands of the Old Testament Law to help us see our need to run to Jesus. And the Holy Spirit creates new life in us that actually allows us to live in the ways Jesus described. This is the life God blesses.

19: Way, truth, and life: John 14:6

20: God's patience: 2 Peter 3:9

21: Repent and receive life: Matthew 4:17; John 10:28





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Apply It

When you notice another Christian's sin, is your first reaction to restore or to condemn?

It is possible to profess the truth of Christ while your words and actions reveal critical judgment of others. Do you readily find fault in others, even judging someone's unseen motives? How we engage is so important. We can be right, but approach people in the wrong way. Choose words that strengthen other believers rather than tear them down. When a person's interpretation of Scripture is not exactly the same as your own, how do you respond? How we interpret the Bible is important, but it is possible that we might be wrong or need to have our own views adjusted. Rather than condemning, cover them in prayer. How firmly do you keep in mind your own sinfulness and need of God's mercy as you relate to others?

The more you grasp that God is your good Father, the more you will seek to interpret life from His perspective. Do you ever pray simply to enjoy fellowship with Him? Or do you pray only because you need something? Do your public prayers try to impress or condemn others? The Disciples' Prayer (usually referred to as the Lord's Prayer) teaches us how to pray as a group for each other. Prayer offered in faith often involves passionate persistence rather than a one-time request. Will you come to your loving Father expectantly, repeatedly, and often as His child? We pray not just to get things from God but also to conform our desires to His. What does how you pray reveal about how good you believe God to be? He is a good Father.

The foundation of your life matters. A life built on knowledge without personal commitment to Christ will be swept away. As you have studied this passage, you have been granted a

magnificent exposure to eternal truth. Do you equate knowledge or "doing the right things" with following Jesus? Will you simply hear this message and move on? Or will you respond in a way that yields to God's generous revelation of truth? God can be trusted when troubles come. **The problems and pressures wise builders face only increase their sense of security in God and His love.** Their lives are safely "hidden with Christ in God."²² This is the great hope and security of God's children.

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained that no one can keep the Law. Jesus Christ is the only person who has ever kept it fully. Has your inability to satisfy God's demands brought you to Christ?²³ **Stop trying to do the impossible and instead acknowledge your need of Jesus.** God not only provides us righteousness we cannot earn; He also equips us with His Spirit so we can live a new life. Look to Him for discernment and humility that recognizes your own needs. Pray with confidence, asking God to equip you to live a life of love built on Jesus Himself.

22: **Security in Christ:** Colossians 3:3

23: **Justified by faith:** Matthew 5:3; Galatians 3:24-25; Ephesians 2:8-9





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