

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

ANSWER KEY

Cover artwork by Harvey L., former Crossroads student



Copyright © 1997, 2004, 2016 by the Publishing Center at Crossroads Prison Ministries. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

v.0826

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lesson 1 4

Lesson 2 14

Lesson 3 28

Lesson 4 39

Lesson 5 48

LESSON 1: The Beatitudes

INTRODUCTION

Crowds. Miracles. Teaching. As you read through the Gospels, you will find that these three words describe a large part of Jesus' ministry.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Matthew 4:23–25, 7:28–29, 8:1–4, 19:2; Mark 1:21–28, 4:2; Luke 4:38–44, 9:37–45; and John 9:1–12, 11:38–57.

In our text (Matthew 5–7), Jesus sits on a hillside by the Sea of Galilee and teaches. The “sermon” taught there, known as the Sermon on the Mount, represents the main themes of Jesus' preaching during His ministry. Essentially, it is a description of life in the Kingdom of God.

The Sermon on the Mount has been called the “Constitution of the Kingdom of God.” This is because the sermon teaches us the characteristics of citizens of the Kingdom of God and the basic principles by which the Kingdom is governed. By viewing Jesus' sermon this way, an outline of its contents becomes clear:

- I. Matthew 5:1–16 describes the characteristics of citizens of the Kingdom of God.
- II. Matthew 5:17 to 7:29 addresses the life and conduct of citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Even though there was a large crowd present to hear Him, Jesus' sermon was directed toward the disciples, and through them, to the whole Church, including us. Let's learn from this sermon how God would have us live in His Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BEATITUDES

READING: Before you continue, please read through the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5:1–12.

In the Old Testament, God formed the nation of Israel, calling them into a relationship with Himself (see Exodus 20 and 24; Deuteronomy 5 and 6, and 7:6). As King, God established a formal agreement with the citizens of His Kingdom called a *covenant*.

Prophets of God were called to pronounce God's blessing on the people when they obeyed the covenant or His curses when they disobeyed the covenant. Matthew 5:3–13 is called the Beatitudes. The name comes from the Latin word *beatitudo*, meaning blessedness. The Beatitudes are oracles, or pronouncements, of blessing from Jesus Christ. If we want to be faithful citizens of God's Kingdom, we must understand what Jesus teaches in the Beatitudes and implement His teaching in our lives.

Some say the word “*blessed*” simply means *happy*. But it means much more. Blessedness is the deep, abiding joy that comes when we live in harmony with God and the principles of His Kingdom.

There are some important things to note about the Beatitudes. First of all, the Beatitudes show us the character of the true Christian, a citizen in God's Kingdom, a character that can only be produced through the power and grace of God. Secondly, the Beatitudes bring us to Christ, because from them, we notice our failure to live how God calls us to, and therefore recognize our need for Christ's righteousness to be credited to us. The Beatitudes are also written in an order that describes the process of growth in the Kingdom of God by which we can examine our own spiritual growth and health. As we study the Beatitudes, let us examine ourselves before God.

1. Before you continue, pray and ask God to show you what it means to be a citizen in the Kingdom of God as you study the Beatitudes. ☐ **Check here when you're done.**

Check required.

2. The word “blessed” means to have the deep, abiding joy that comes when we live in **harmony** with God and the **principles** of His Kingdom.
3. The Psalms begin with a promise of blessing and a warning to the wicked. Read Psalm 1.
 - a. What does a blessed person delight in?

A blessed person delights in the Law of the Lord.

- b. What will be the future of the wicked?

They will not stand in the judgment, nor in the assembly of the righteous. Their future holds destruction.

THE FIRST BEATITUDE

Poor in Spirit | Matthew 5:3

The first of eight beatitudes describes the beginning point of growth as a citizen of the Kingdom. It is being “*poor in spirit*.” This phrase can be understood by thinking of actual poverty, the state of being poor, as it is described in the Bible. In the Bible, the poor are those who have to utterly depend on others because they lack the personal resources or abilities to live in a state of wellbeing. Likewise, Christians who are “poor in spirit” have recognized that they are totally dependent on God for their own wellbeing. They have recognized the sin and corruption of their hearts and know that they do not have the resources or abilities to please God on their own. They know that they need the help of the King—Jesus Christ.

Christians who are poor in spirit are humble. They live in humility when they are living in complete dependence on God—His mercy and His grace. These Christians must rid themselves of their selfishness, pride, and self-reliance.

Poorness in spirit is realized in our lives as we stand in the awesome presence of our holy and just King. We see that as we stand before God’s majesty we are nothing and depend totally upon Him.

Being poor in spirit is the first step toward Christian growth. Notice that this first step opens the Kingdom of Heaven to the Christian. In our world, the rich, powerful, and famous have kingdoms. In God’s Kingdom, however, it is the poor in spirit, those who utterly depend on God, who gain the Kingdom of Heaven.

4. Christians who are “poor in spirit” have recognized that they are **totally dependent** on God for their own wellbeing. They have recognized the **sin** and **corruption** of their hearts and know that they do not have the resources or abilities to please God. They know they need the **help** of the King.
5. Read 1 Peter 5:5–7 and answer the following questions.

a. With what are we to be clothed?

We are to be clothed with humility.

b. “God **opposes** the proud, but shows **favor (or grace)** to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5).

6. Read Isaiah 6:1–5. Here Isaiah is driven to see that he is poor in spirit. What caused this?

Isaiah saw the awesome majesty, glory, authority, and holiness of God who was worshiped by the angels. In contrast to this, Isaiah realized his own sinful condition and his need for total dependence upon this Holy God.

7. Read Philippians 2:3–5 and fill in the blanks below.

Do nothing out of selfish **ambition** or vain **conceit**. Rather, in **humility** value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the **others**. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as **Christ Jesus**.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Job 5:11; Proverbs 3:34, 11:2; Ecclesiastes 5:1–3; Isaiah 57:15, 66:2; Matthew 20:26; Luke 6:20, 14:10; John 13:14; Romans 12:3, 12:16; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:12; and James 1:9, 4:10.

THE SECOND BEATITUDE

Mourning Over Sin | Matthew 5:4

How can this be: Blessedness from mourning? Yet, that is exactly what this beatitude declares. The “*mourning*” in this beatitude refers to the mourning that occurs when we stand in poverty of spirit before a holy God. Citizens of the Kingdom of God constantly recognize their unholiness and sin before their Holy King and sorrowfully mourn over it. They cry out to the Holy One for grace, mercy, and freedom from sin and its consequences. Not only do citizens of the Kingdom of God mourn over their own sins, but they mourn for all the sin around them. They recognize that all sin and unholiness is a stench in God’s nostrils.

Notice Jesus’ promise to those who mourn because of their sin and unholiness—“*they will be comforted*.” When Christians face the terror that comes from recognizing their sin before a holy God, they are filled with joy and blessedness as the Gospel declares their deliverance from this sin and reconciliation to God in:

- the past as Christ forgives them for sins committed.
- the present as they are delivered from the daily power and effects of sin.
- the future as they recognize that their sin will be removed forever when Christ redeems His people on the Last Day.

The Christian knows that there will not be complete comfort from mourning in this life. There will still be suffering and affliction, and we still struggle with sin (Romans 7). But for the Christian, there is true and complete comfort in heaven and because of this, we can rejoice (Psalm 30:4–5, 126:5–6) and not lose heart (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

8. How does God respond to our sin, according to Romans 1:18?

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against our sin.

9. Read Psalm 5:4–6 and fill in the blanks below.

“For you are not a God who is **pleased** with **wickedness (or evil)** ; with you, **evil (or wicked)** people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot **stand** in your presence. You **hate** all who do wrong; you **destroy** those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, Lord, **detest (or abhor)**.”

10. According to what we learned in this beatitude, what does the Christian mourn over?

Christians mourn over their sin and poverty of spirit, as well as the sin they see all around them.

11. Read 2 Chronicles 7:14.

a. If we want God to hear us when we talk to Him, what must we do?

We must humble ourselves, pray, seek God’s face, and turn from our wicked ways.

b. If we do this, what will God do?

Then God will hear, will forgive our sins, and heal our land.

12. Read Isaiah 6:1–8. God met Isaiah in a powerful way. What was Isaiah’s response to God’s majestic holiness?

A student should respond with at least some of the following: Isaiah realized his sinful condition—so much so that as a prophet he pronounced an oracle of woe upon himself! Furthermore, he clearly identified not only his own sin, but also the sin of the world around him. In the midst of this awesome recognition of his sin and the sinful world, we cannot help but think that as the angel approached Isaiah, he was expecting death. However, God in marvelous grace granted Isaiah atonement for his sin and the cleansing he was so in need of. Not only that, Isaiah was prepared for, and responded to, a call for service.

THE THIRD BEATITUDE

Meekness Is Not Weakness | *Matthew 5:5*

The Beatitudes move in an order that describes the process of spiritual growth by which we can evaluate our spiritual condition as citizens in God’s Kingdom. When Christians begin with poverty in spirit, they start to mourn over their sin and the sin of the world as it is lived out before the face of a holy God. This then leads to meekness. Meekness is the quality of having a submissive, gentle, and patient attitude even though we may have great strength and power.

Meek people are **not** weak people. The word for meekness in this verse finds its background in the training of horses. A horse is a very powerful animal, able to kill someone with a simple kick of a hoof. The goal in training a horse, however, is not to remove the power of the horse, but to bring its power under the control of its master. The goal of the trainer is to get the horse to submit to its master and follow their lead. The same can be said of a Christian. God

has created us with great power and abilities in both mind and body. These are to be submitted to our Master. When we have submitted to God, we are then called meek. A meek person is a person harnessed under God's control.

People who submit their lives to God will "inherit the earth." This does not mean that we will just inherit a piece of property. Rather, it means that we will receive from God blessing and security as we live in His presence.

In one sense, the meek already inherit the earth in this life because we already experience the presence and blessing of God in a limited way right now. In heaven, however, we will experience the full security that comes by living totally in God's presence without the influence of sin and evil around us.

13. How does the definition of biblical meekness described above differ from the idea that meekness is weakness?

We generally think of meek people as weak, soft-spoken people, maybe even with low self-esteem and other social and emotional problems. In contrast to this, we see that a meek person is actually one with great power and abilities in both mind and body, but these qualities are submitted to God and harnessed under His control. It takes strength to be submissive, gentle, and patient when our inclinations are just the opposite.

14. Read Philippians 2:6–11, Hebrews 2:9–18, and 1 Peter 2:21–25 and review the crucifixion story in Matthew 27:27–55. Make a list of some of the ways Christ demonstrated meekness.

Students should respond with at least some of the following:

- **He did not retaliate when they hurled insults at Him.**
- **He made no threats even though He was in great pain and had the power to destroy His accusers; instead He entrusted Himself to God, the Just Judge.**
- **Christ submitted Himself and allowed the soldiers to strip Him of His clothes.**
- **They mocked His authority as King, placing a staff in His hand and kneeling before Him.**
- **Christ was crowned with thorns.**
- **The soldiers mocked and beat Christ.**
- **Jesus allowed the soldiers to nail Him to the cross with criminals even though He had done nothing wrong.**
- **He refused wine and gall to deaden His pain.**
- **Christ could have come down off of the cross but instead He chose the way of submission to His Father's will.**

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Job 22:21; Psalm 37:11; 2 Corinthians 10:1; Galatians 5:23; Ephesians 4:2; Philippians 4:5; Colossians 3:12; Titus 3:2; and James 3:17, 4:7.

THE FOURTH BEATITUDE

Hungering for Righteousness | Matthew 5:6

The beatitude “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*” refers to the desire to be free from all sin in all forms; it involves a sincere desire to be holy. Righteousness is being right with God.

We remember that blessedness is the deep, abiding joy that comes when we live in harmony with God and the rules of His Kingdom. This beatitude teaches us that we must hunger and thirst to live right with God. We must hunger and thirst to live our lives according to His commands. Hunger and thirst are deep passions and cravings that go on until satisfied. It becomes desperate and agonizing. The psalmist’s hunger in Psalm 42 is what Jesus is talking about here.

If we truly hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will be satisfied by Christ Himself, because He alone is our righteousness. Satisfaction in Christ happens immediately for those who believe, but just like you continually crave food and drink, there is also an ongoing process because the removal of sin, which is done by the Holy Spirit, is a lifelong process. The perfect fulfillment of this beatitude’s promise comes in heaven, when all Christians will be gathered at the throne of God, standing blameless and perfect before Him and experiencing the true fulfillment and satisfaction of their souls’ deepest longings.

15. Read Matthew 6:31–33.

a. What must a Christian seek first?

The Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

b. What will then be added to us?

Food, drink, clothing, and everything else we need.

16. Fill in the blanks below based on your reading.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” refers to the **desire** to be free from **all sin** in all forms; it involves a sincere desire to be **holy**.

17. Memorize Psalm 42:1–2. ☐ **Check here when you’re done.**

Check required.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Psalm 1, Psalm 17:15, Psalm 37; Isaiah 26:9; Hosea 14:9; Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 5:19; Ephesians 4:24; 1 Timothy 6:1; and 2 Timothy 2:22.

THE FIFTH BEATITUDE

Compassion in Action | Matthew 5:7

This beatitude declares that we are blessed when we are merciful. Mercy is compassion that causes one to help a poor, sick, or needy person. Mercy is compassion in action! Mercy is also a sense of pity with a desire to relieve the suffering that causes misery.

God has shown great mercy toward us. God’s mercy and love were seen most clearly in His

Son's death on the cross when we were saved. We weren't saved because of any righteous things we did, but simply because of God's mercy and kindness. God's mercy should motivate the citizen of the Kingdom of God to show mercy to others, especially to those in need (Psalm 41:1). We do not show mercy in order to receive mercy in return, but we show mercy because we have been given mercy from God.

18. Mercy is compassion in **action**.

19. Read Titus 3:3–6. Circle the right answer below.

a. God saved me because of good and righteous things I have done.

☒ b. God saved me because He is loving, kind, and merciful.

20. Mercy is rooted in the character of God. Read Deuteronomy 4:31, Nehemiah 9:31, and Jeremiah 3:12.

What do all these verses declare about God?

That He is gracious and merciful.

21. As members of the Kingdom of God, we are to reflect the character of God to the world around us. Read Romans 8:5–9 and 1 John 3:16–18. Considering the prevalence of sin in humanity, what enables Christians to show mercy to the world as Christ did, and in what ways can we show mercy?

Christians are able to show mercy because the Spirit of Christ lives in the hearts of Christians. Christians can show mercy through actions, which include peace, love and selflessness, as well as by offering materials to those in need.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Proverbs 3:3; Micah 6:8; Matthew 18:33, 23:23; Luke 6:36; James 3:17; and Jude 1:22.

THE SIXTH BEATITUDE

Pure in Heart | *Matthew 5:8*

When the Bible speaks about the heart of a person, it is referring to the inner, hidden part of us—who and what we really are down deep inside. The heart is our inner person, the part of us from which flow our thoughts, desires, intentions, beliefs, and purposes. The heart is the center of the human being, the fountain from which all things flow. God, therefore, is uniquely concerned with our heart. God searches our hearts. He is searching for pure hearts.

The word “pure” has two meanings. First, to be pure is to be single or unmixed. A pure person is not “two-faced,” nor are they a hypocrite or a deceiver. The pure Christian is one who serves God alone and is motivated by a single love for God alone.

Second, to be pure refers to being cleansed and without dirtiness. In the Bible, sin is often referred to as impurity or uncleanness. The Bible says that no one with impurity or uncleanness will enter into the Kingdom.

The Christian with a pure heart strives to be like Jesus: free of sin and loving God with his or her all. Since God alone can change and purify the heart, this beatitude must find a special place in our prayers.

The promise attached to this beatitude and the goal of Christian living is to “see God.” As with the other Beatitudes, this promise is partly fulfilled already today, but not yet completely. We can see God working in nature, history, and Scripture. We even see God at work in our own lives. Indeed, God is near us, but He is invisible. And we long to see Him face to face. We hunger to gaze upon His glory, seeing Him as He really is. While there are times in this life where we may have special mountaintop experiences with God, this promise to see God will be truly fulfilled when we reach heaven.

22. Fill in the blanks from your reading above.

First of all, to be pure is to be **single** or **unmixed**.

Second, purity refers to being **cleansed** and without dirtiness.

23. Read Psalm 15 and Psalm 24:3–6. How does David describe the person who will be in God’s presence?

Their walk is blameless; they do what is righteous. They have no slander on their tongue and cast no slur on others. They despise vile people but honor those who fear the Lord; they keep oaths even when it hurts. They lend money without charging interest; they don’t accept bribes. They have clean hands and a pure heart, and do not lift up their souls to an idol or swear by what is false. All this is to say that in order to see God and live in His presence, we must have a pure heart.

24. The purity spoken of in this beatitude also reminds us of the life of holiness God calls us to. Read Hebrews 12:14. In order to see God, what must we have?

Holiness, for without this we will not see God.

25. Revelation 22:4 speaks about heaven. What will we be able to see there?

We will see His face.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Job 33:9; Psalm 24:4, 51:10, 73:1 and 13, 119:9; Proverbs 20:9; Jeremiah 4:14; 2 Corinthians 11:2–3; Philippians 1:10, 2:15, 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 1 Timothy 1:5, 4:7; and 2 Timothy 2:22.

THE SEVENTH BEATITUDE

Keeping the Peace | *Matthew 5:9*

Let’s review. The citizen in God’s Kingdom will be poor in spirit, mournful over sin, meek, hungering for righteousness, merciful, and pure in heart. A Christian with these characteristics must now become a peacemaker.

Peace can be defined as the presence of order and harmony and the absence of hostility. Peacemakers, therefore, are people of God who bring peace to our world of chaos, sin, and hostility.

God is a God of peace. In Creation, He brought order and harmony out of chaos. In Redemption, He ends the hostility that exists between Himself and humanity by the sacrifice of His own dear Son. As God is a peacemaker, so the Christian must be a peacemaker. We must be people who bring justice, order, and reconciliation to our world. While there are many ways for us to do this, at the forefront of our activities should be the proclamation of the Gospel of peace and reconciliation.

If we do this, we earn the right to be called the “children of God” because we are being like Him, reflecting the character of our Father in heaven. If we do this, we are working together with Christ—the Prince of Peace.

26. Read Isaiah 9:6–7. These verses are a prophecy about the coming of Jesus Christ to establish His Kingdom, the very Kingdom described in the Sermon on the Mount.

a. What title given to Christ correlates with this beatitude?

Prince of Peace.

b. Fill in the blanks from verse 7.

“Of the greatness of his government and **peace** there will be no **end**.”

27. Read Romans 12:17–21. List three things that we can do to promote peace.

Students should respond with at least three of the following:

- **Do not repay evil for evil.**
- **Do what is right as we live our lives before the world.**
- **Take the lead in living at peace with everyone.**
- **Do not take revenge; leave that to God.**
- **Overcome evil with good.**
- **Care for your enemy.**

28. Read James 3:18. Fill in the blanks below and remember this proverb as a helpful tool in life.

“**Peacemakers** who sow in **peace** reap a harvest of righteousness.”

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Psalm 34:14; Romans 12:18, 14:19; 1 Corinthians 14:33; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 2:14–15 & 17, 4:3; Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Titus 3:2; Hebrews 12:14; James 3:17–18; and 1 Peter 3:11.

THE EIGHTH BEATITUDE

Persecution | *Matthew 5:10–12*

The Prince of Peace—Jesus Christ—was persecuted and killed. All Christians should be prepared for the same. The world hates righteous people. The world hates peacemakers. 1 John 3:13 says that this shouldn’t surprise us.

We must be careful with this beatitude. Notice that we are blessed if we are “*persecuted because of righteousness*.” Righteousness is being like Jesus, and if we live like Jesus we can expect to suffer. However, Christians cannot use this verse to somehow justify being obnoxious or overbearing in their dealings with people.

The fact that we are persecuted for righteousness gives us proof that we are in the Kingdom and are living as a Kingdom citizen. If we are persecuted simply because we have been like Christ, then we know we are going to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus knows we will be persecuted, and He expands on the beatitude in verses 11 and 12. He again reminds us that blessed persecution is that which occurs “*because of me*” (Jesus). He also reminds us that a great reward awaits us in heaven as we patiently endure suffering for His sake.

29. Read 1 Peter 4:12–16 and answer the following questions.

a. When we suffer for Christ, what rests upon us?

The Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

b. When we suffer, we are not to be ashamed, but we are to do what?

Praise God that you bear that name.

30. Read 1 Peter 2:21–23. Here we learn that we are actually called to suffer. We are to follow the example of Christ. How did Christ respond to His suffering according to these verses?

He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth. When they hurled insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly.

31. Read Revelation 2:10 and 12:11. As citizens in God’s Kingdom, what must we be prepared to do?

We must be prepared to give open testimony to Christ and His sacrifice for us, and even be willing to die for that testimony.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Psalm 37:32, 119:61; Proverbs 29:10; Isaiah 59:15; Jeremiah 20:18; Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 4:9; 2 Corinthians 1:24, 4:8, 6:4 & 8, 12:10; Hebrews 11:35, 12:3–4; and 1 Peter 3:14 & 16.

SUMMARY

The Christian’s Function in the World | Matthew 5:13–16

Matthew 5:13–16 will close our study of the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes have shown us who and what a true citizen of the Kingdom is. Now we must discover the function of the Christian and the Kingdom in this world. To help us understand this, Jesus uses the metaphors of salt and light.

First, the Christian and the Kingdom are like “*salt*” to the world. Salt is a preservative; it stops food from becoming rotten. Likewise, the Christian functions in the world as a positive

influence to stop the decay of the world by sin and the evil one. The presence of the Christian in the world has a purifying and preserving effect; it keeps the world from total corruption.

Salt is also a flavoring, bringing out the good taste in food. The Christian functions in this way also, bringing out, enhancing, and supporting what is good in the world (see Colossians 4:1–5). Declaring to the world the joy of our salvation and the satisfaction that comes to our lives as we serve our King is of special importance.

The salt used in Jesus' time was of a type that could lose its saltiness—then it was thrown onto the roads as gravel (see Mark 9:50 and Luke 14:34–35). Here Jesus teaches that the true Christian must retain the Christian virtues discussed in the Beatitudes. If they do not, they too are worthless and will be thrown out to be trampled underfoot.

Second, Jesus uses the metaphor of "*light*" to illustrate the function of the Kingdom in the world. The world is in spiritual darkness, blinded by sin to the light and truth of God (John 8:12). As the full moon reflects the light and glory of the sun, so the Christian is to reflect the truth and glory of God and His Son to this dark world. The function of light is to make things visible, showing their true form. Likewise, the Christian and the Church shine into the darkness of this world, showing what God requires and revealing humanity's sinful condition and what is to be done about it.

This light must not be hidden—the world cannot survive without Christians (see Luke 8:16–18 and 11:33–36)! We are to be in the world, but not of it. Jesus gives us an awesome promise: if we reflect the truth and glory of God to the world through godly living, people will turn and glorify God!

32. The Law of God shows us how to live before other people. Read Deuteronomy 5:6–21 and Matthew 22:36–40.

a. Describe some ways that you can be salt and light where you are.

The student should include in the response some reference to obeying the Ten Commandments as well as to loving God and our neighbor.

b. Some people have taught that Christians must leave the world altogether, living in total separation from the world. How does Jesus Himself refute this teaching in John 17:14–18?

Rather than separate completely from the world, Jesus prays here that we might:

- **Not be taken out of the world.**
- **Be protected from the Evil One while we are in the world.**
- **Be made more and more holy (sanctified) as we live in the world.**

33. Pick two of the eight beatitudes studied in this lesson which were the most important truths you learned and discuss how you will apply those characteristics to your life as you strive to live as a citizen in God's Kingdom.

Here students will come up with a variety of answers. Be alert to ways that you can encourage them. This may also provide you with some insight into what is happening in their lives. Be sensitive to how you can best minister to them in their present situation.

34. If you belong to Christ and live as a citizen in His Kingdom, pray to your King, asking Him for these characteristics and thanking Him for His blessings. For your next lesson: Read the entire Sermon on the Mount through all at one time—spend some extra time on Matthew 5:17–48, the passages you'll study next lesson.

Encourage the student to read through the Sermon on the Mount in one sitting. The student will be asked to do this at the end of each lesson.

LESSON 2: The Christian's Relationship to the Old Testament

INTRODUCTION

In Lesson 1, we learned about the character of the citizen of the Kingdom of God based on Jesus' teaching from the Beatitudes. We also learned that our function as Christians in this world is to reflect God's character and glory to the world as we live day by day (Matthew 5:14-16).

The rest of the Sermon on the Mount will deal with how the Christian is to think and act. In Jesus' day, God's standard for evaluating a person's thoughts and behavior was His Law in the Old Testament. The people Jesus was teaching knew this Law, but they were also influenced by another prominent example during their day: the Pharisees, or Scribes, who had distorted God's Law. It was necessary, therefore, for Jesus to state how He stood in relationship to the Old Testament and to remind the listeners of God's Law. Furthermore, as followers of Jesus, we are required to understand the Old Testament in the same way as our Master.

In Matthew 5:17-18 Jesus describes His relationship to the Old Testament. In verses 19-20 we will learn what our relationship to the Old Testament must be. Then Jesus gives us six examples to illustrate how we are to interpret and live out the commands God gives us in the Old Testament (Matthew 5:21-48).

JESUS' RELATIONSHIP TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Matthew 5:17-18

READING: Before you begin, please read Matthew 5:17-18.

In Jesus' day the scribes and Pharisees were seen as holy men and experts on the Old Testament Law (Matthew 22:34-35). Jesus was not a Pharisee and so His teaching and His attitude toward the Pharisees were viewed by some as an act of rebellion against the Old Testament Kingdom of God. But in these verses, however, Jesus makes it very clear that He is not destroying the Old Testament or rebelling against it, but rather, He is fulfilling the Old Testament and carrying out everything it points to.

VERSE 17. Jesus did not come to destroy or abolish the "*Law and the Prophets*." The phrase "*Law and Prophets*" means the entire Old Testament. Jesus did not come to set men free from their obligation to obey the Old Testament. Nor did He come to destroy, defy, or deny the authority of the Old Testament. Actually, the opposite is true—Jesus came to fulfill the Old Testament. This means that Jesus came to:

- Fulfill, or bring to completion, all the Old Testament prophecies about Himself (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:14, 9:1-2, 53:3-6).
- Complete or finish (end) the many Old Testament rites and sacrifices that pointed to Him (Hebrews 10:1-18).
- Obey Old Testament Law as it was intended to be obeyed, the Law that we, in our sin, failed to obey, so that He might redeem us. And, by doing so, model for us how we are to live as redeemed citizens in God's Kingdom (John 4:34, 17:4, Galatians 4:4, Philippians 2:8, and Hebrews 5:8).

This last point is of great importance for us. Some people put great significance simply on the fact that Jesus died for our sins—and rightly so. However, we must remember that Jesus'

sacrifice had to be a perfect sacrifice and in order for His sacrifice to be perfect, His life had to be perfect. If Jesus would have sinned in anyway whatsoever, His sacrifice would not have been pleasing and acceptable to His Father, and then, of no benefit to us (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). In other words, if Jesus was going to save us through the perfect sacrifice of His life, He would have to keep the Old Testament Law perfectly.

VERSE 18. The force of verse 18 is that all of the Old Testament law must be completed or carried out before it can be abolished. We know that *some* of the Old Testament Law has already been completed through the appearance and work of Jesus Himself. This includes all the Old Testament ceremonial laws—which include sacrifices and ritual cleansing—as well as all the prophecies and practices that pointed to the coming Messiah and His work. Also completed in the coming of Jesus are all the Old Testament civil laws—laws specific to the Old Testament society—because the Kingdom of God ushered in by Jesus is not a physical kingdom like Israel, but a spiritual Kingdom.

1. Read Galatians 4:4-5. Here we see that Jesus was born at just the right time, “*born of a woman, born **under** the **law**, to **redeem** those under the **law**, that we might receive adoption to sonship.*”
2. At certain times the Father audibly declared from Heaven that the obedient life of His Son was acceptable to Him.

- a. In Mark 1:11, at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, what did the Father declare?

“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

- b. Mark 9:2-10 records an event called the Transfiguration near the end of Jesus’ ministry. Peter refers to this event in 2 Peter 1:17. According to Peter, what did the Father say at the Transfiguration?

“This is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased.”

3. After Jesus accomplished the work He came to do on earth, He appeared to the disciples.

- a. Read about this in Luke 24:36-49. ☐ **Check here when you’re done.**

Check required.

- b. Jesus said (verse 44), “*Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the **law** of Moses, the **prophets** and the **psalms**.*”

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Matthew 5:19-20

READING: Please read Matthew 5:19-20.

VERSE 19. As New Testament citizens of the Kingdom of God, we are to understand the Old Testament in the light of all we have just learned, and praise God for His marvelous plan of

salvation described and predicted in the Old Testament. But we are to do more. There is a part of Old Testament law called the moral law. This law is written on the hearts of all believers (Jeremiah 31:33). The essence of the moral law is love. The moral law is given expression in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5); a summary of the moral law is given by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40.

Read through the moral law recorded in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Then read Jesus' summary of this law in Matthew 22:37-40. ☐ **Check here when you're done.**

Thus we can come to these conclusions:

- Jesus perfectly fulfilled and finished the ceremonial, dietary, and sacrificial laws that pointed forward to Himself.
- Jesus obeyed the moral law of the Old Testament perfectly.
- We are to follow Jesus in carrying out the moral law (love) in our daily lives. (Below we will see that this is all done through the power of the Holy Spirit.)

If we teach the Law of God, if we observe it, if we love God and our neighbor as ourselves, then we shall be great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

VERSE 20. We must not interpret the Old Testament as the Pharisees did. The Jewish sect of the Pharisees had begun during the Babylonian captivity as a genuine movement to call Israel back to righteousness. But by Jesus' day, however, the movement had "gone to seed"—that is, they had made holiness purely a matter of external living, or legalism. They had stressed only part of God's law—the ritual part. They gave God tithes, but not their hearts. They thought God only looked at the outside, not the inside. They cared about what other people thought of them rather than what God thought of them. They no longer emphasized the importance of humility and the need for a clean and pure heart. Therefore they were denounced by Jesus for making observance of Old Testament Law simply a matter of outward conformity and externals without a proper inner attitude that sprang from a changed heart.

In fact, the Pharisees had introduced an additional 633 laws which were used to interpret the Old Testament in an external fashion. This is why Jesus pronounces His oracles of woe upon the Pharisees again and again (see Matthew 23 and Luke 11:37-54). Jesus tells us that our righteousness is to exceed that of the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). We must be the kind of people described in the Beatitudes we just studied.

4. Read Romans 10:1-4. What does Paul say about the people who were taught by Pharisees? Fill in the blanks below.

*"Since they did not know the **righteousness** of God and sought to **establish** their **own**, they did not submit to God's righteousness."*

5. Read Jeremiah 31:31-33 (see also Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16). This is speaking of the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the coming of Christ.
 - a. Where does God write the Law now?

In our mind or heart.

- b. What does this mean to you?

Students may have various ways of answering this question, but the basic idea is that among God's people the Law of God has become a living instrument that is used and shared by all.

6. When the Apostle Paul speaks against bondage to the law (as in Galatians 3-5), he is referring to the Old Testament Law as it was misinterpreted by the Pharisees; he is speaking against legalism, a purely external righteousness.
- a. Read Galatians 5:13-14. What Law are we to follow?

We are to follow the law of love—love your neighbor as yourself.

- b. Read Galatians 5:18.

Jesus declares in Matthew 22:37-40 that we are to obey the law. Yet Paul says in Galatians 5:18, *"But if you are led by the **Spirit**, you are not **under** the **law**."*

Does Paul disagree with Jesus? Not at all. When Paul refers to "law" here, he is not referring to the moral law, but to the law as it was misunderstood and taught by the Pharisees. Paul agrees with Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount. He knows that we are to obey the moral law, and he knows that this law has now been written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

- c. Read Galatians 5:25. Fill in the blanks below.

*"Since we live by the **Spirit**, let us keep in step with the **Spirit**."*

7. Review the Ten Commandments from Deuteronomy 5:6-21. From what you learned in this study, do you believe we have to obey these commandments today? Why or why not?

Hopefully the student will respond with Yes! Why? Because it is the very Law of God that is written upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Matthew 15:1-9, 16:1-12, 21:33-46, Matthew 23, and Luke 11:37-54.

INTERPRETING THE OLD TESTAMENT

Matthew 5:21-48

READING: Please read Matthew 5:21-48.

In these verses Jesus uses six examples that show us how we are to interpret and apply Old Testament Law to our lives. Jesus was reminding the disciples and all the listeners about the Law that was given to Moses and how to interpret it correctly. These examples also show us where the Pharisees went wrong in their interpretation of the law. Each of the six examples begins with the words, *"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago . . .,"* which reminds the people of the Old Testament Law. For too long they had been swayed by the Pharisees' distorted teachings. Jesus needed to reaffirm the moral law commanded by God and He did so by saying, *"But I tell you . . ."* In this He was declaring His authority over any

interpretation the Pharisees had given to Old Testament Law and reinstating what God commands, because He is God.

KILLING AND ANGER

Matthew 5:21-26

READING: Please read Matthew 5:21-26.

VERSES 21-22. The Pharisees had determined that the Sixth Commandment, "*You shall not murder*," meant nothing more or less than actual homicide, punishable before a civil court. In their minds, to keep the Sixth Commandment, all one had to do was refrain from actually committing the act of murder.

In contrast to the Pharisees, Jesus says the Sixth Commandment covers not only the act of murder, but also the inner thoughts and feelings that bring murder to pass. God is just as offended by wrong anger (seething or brooding bitterness), malice, and contempt as He is by actual murder. Hurtfully attacking someone's character springs from the same root motives as actual assassination. We have all broken the Sixth Commandment and, apart from Christ, we are in danger not only of the civil court, but also of eternal judgment and hell.

VERSES 23-24. The Pharisees emphasized external acts of worship as the way to become right with God. In contrast, Jesus teaches that outward acts of worship are only meaningful when they spring from a right heart. God will accept our acts of worship only when we have:

- Remembered our sin. We must acknowledge our sin before God and other people without making excuses (verse 23).
- Reconciled ourselves to the injured party. We are to settle our difficulties and make restitution if necessary. We must do everything within our power to settle matters with one another, seeking to do all we can to live at peace with everyone (verse 24).

VERSES 25-26. Jesus' point here is that we are to settle matters immediately. Sin has consequences. We can avoid deeper consequences for our sin through immediate confession of sin and immediate efforts at reconciliation.

8. In Ephesians 4:26-32, Paul makes the same point about anger that Jesus does.

- a. What must not happen when we are angry (verse 26)?

In our anger, we must not sin; we must not let the sun go down while we are still angry.

- b. What does anger do (verse 27)?

Unresolved anger gives the devil a foothold into a person's life.

- c. What are we to get rid of (verse 31)?

We are to get rid of bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, as well as malice—all of the emotions behind murder.

- d. Why are we to be kind and compassionate (verse 32)?

Because God has forgiven us if we are in Christ.

9. In 1 Samuel 15 Saul is rejected by God as the king of Israel because of his sins. Saul thought that mere sacrifices would cover his sins. But God's prophet Samuel says, "**Obey** is better than **sacrifice**" (verse 22).
10. Psalm 66 is a psalm of praise to God for answered prayer. The psalmist is confident that his prayers would not have been heard if he had "**cherished** sin in my **heart**" (verse 18).
11. Read Hebrews 12:14-15. If we do not take care of our sin immediately, a "*bitter root*" can grow and cause trouble. What does the writer of Hebrews tell us to "*make every effort*" to do?

Live in peace with all people, and to be holy.

12. Not all hatred and anger is wrong in God's sight. In fact, there are some things that we definitely are to hate! According to Psalm 97:10, what is it that we should hate?

We are to hate evil.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Exodus 20:13, 21:12; Leviticus 19:17; Deuteronomy 5:17; Proverbs 10:12, 26:24; Ecclesiastes 7:9, 1 Corinthians 13:5; Ephesians 4:26 & 31; Colossians 3:8; James 1:19-20; James 3; 1 John 2:9 & 11; 3:15, 4:20.

ADULTERY IN THE HEART

Matthew 5:27-30

READING: Please read Matthew 5:27-30.

VERSES 27-28. Once again, the Pharisees took the Seventh Commandment, "*You shall not commit adultery*," and limited it to only the external act of taking another man's wife. The Pharisees regarded evil thoughts, lust, and an unrestrained imagination to be of little consequence, not forbidden by the law.

In contrast to the Pharisees' interpretation of the Seventh Commandment, Jesus says that this commandment covers not only the act of adultery, but also the desires of the heart and the movements of the hand and eye. God is offended by our sinful actions and the sinful desires of our heart. For Jesus, adultery refers to any actual sexual relations outside the bonds of the marriage of one man to one woman, as well as any lustful looks and thoughts of adultery in our minds.

VERSES 29-30. In these verses Jesus makes use of a literary device called hyperbole, which is an obvious exaggeration used to make a point. Jesus does not mean that we are to literally cut off our hands and pluck out our eyes. Rather, His point is to show us the power and extent of sin, and how it must be radically dealt with if we expect to overcome its snare. Much sin begins with our imagination. We must watch what we feed our minds and imagination. We are not to live with uncontrolled desires. If we do, we will sin.

13. Read 2 Samuel 11:1 to 12:25, noting how David's lust turned to adultery and murder. Also read Psalm 51, David's response to these sins. ☐ **Check here when you're done.**

Check required.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Exodus 20:14; Jeremiah 3:1-2, 9:2, 23:10; Ezekiel 16:15-16; Hosea 1, 2:1-2, 3:1, 7:1-4; Matthew 15:19, 19:9; Romans 7:1-6; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

DIVORCE

Matthew 5:31-32

READING: Please read Matthew 5:31-32.

The quote in verse 31 is a summary of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. This law was given by God to Moses as a corrective measure, because in Moses' day women were treated as a simple piece of property. As a result, men divorced their wives over the most trivial matters. This led to social chaos. So the original intent of the law in the Old Testament was to protect women, control divorce, and bring order out of a chaotic situation. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), but He knows we live in a broken, sinful world. Therefore, this regulation was given to control divorce, something He actually disapproved of.

Some Pharisees interpreted this law in a perverse manner. They said:

- Deuteronomy 24:1-4 *commanded* divorce.
- Grounds for divorce could be given for anything that a husband considered to be *displeasing* or *indecent* about his wife.

In Jesus' day, a great debate raged about the issue of divorce. Jesus was asked His opinion on the matter several times. Please read Matthew 19:3-9. **☐ Check here when you're done.** Jesus cut right through all the debate about divorce by going back to God's intent for marriage in Creation. Jesus declares:

- Marriage is sacred because it is part of God's holy plan for the human race from the beginning. Divorce is sin because it violates this holy order.
- Divorce is not commanded by God anywhere. The law in the Kingdom of God is based on love and forgiveness which is to be applied to all relationships, including marriage.
- There is only one possible ground for divorce: marital unfaithfulness. Even here Jesus is not commanding divorce, but simply permitting it.

As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we must always be driven by love to seek forgiveness and reconciliation in every area of our life—including our marriages.

Check required between questions 13 and 14.

14. In Matthew 19:3-9 Jesus takes us back to God's original intent for marriage. Write out the principle in verse 6.

They are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.

15. Paul uses marriage as an illustration of the relationship of Christ to the Church in Ephesians 5:21-33. **☐ Read it and check here when you're done.**

Check required.

16. Every family in the Kingdom of God needs to make the commitment of Joshua in Joshua 24:15, "*But as for me and my household, **we will serve the Lord***"

READING: Please read Matthew 5:33-37.

The Old Testament laws about bearing false witness and oath-taking were meant to hinder and control our proneness to lying. An oath is a solemn appeal to God to witness one's determination to speak the truth, calling down His vengeance if any falsehood is spoken.

Oaths were to be used sparingly and only on important occasions. Against this solemn Old Testament backdrop, the Pharisees had introduced an elaborate scheme for oath-taking that offended Jesus on several points:

- They had introduced oaths into everyday conversation.
- They had built an elaborate scheme to determine how binding an oath was by how closely the oath was related to God's Name (e.g., an oath sworn "by Jerusalem" [God's holy city] was more binding than an oath sworn "by your head").
- They had determined that some oath-taking was non-binding.

To understand Jesus' response to the Pharisees here, we must first see that Jesus is not condemning all oath-taking. Rather, Jesus is simply saying that we must take truth, honesty, and oath-taking seriously. Second, Jesus makes the point in verses 34-35 that all oaths are in some way related to God, so no oaths are to be taken lightly.

Jesus concludes that the Christian must be truthful, someone that does not need oaths in order to be believed. A Christian's word alone ought to be trusted. The taking of oaths must be left only to the solemn events of life. Any oath-taking beyond the solemn events of life can only be motivated by an evil intent.

17. We know that God allows (and commands) oath-taking on solemn, important occasions. In each of the passages listed below, who is taking an oath?
- a. Hebrews 6:13 (See also Genesis 22:16-18):

God the Father

- b. Matthew 26:63-64:

Jesus Christ

- c. Romans 1:1 & 9:

The Apostle Paul

18. What does James teach about oath-taking in James 5:12?

Do not swear—by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no.

19. In Ephesians 4:25, Paul says, "Therefore each of you must put off **falsehood** and speak **truthfully** to your neighbor. . . ."

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Deuteronomy 6:23, 10:20; Ecclesiastes 5:4-5; Isaiah 45:23; Jeremiah 4:2; 2 Corinthians 1:23; and Hebrews 6:16.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

Matthew 5:38-42

READING: Please read Matthew 5:38-42.

The quoted statement in verse 38 is taken directly from the Old Testament and is called the “Law of Retaliation.” God gave this law as a judicial guideline because of our proneness toward severe punishment. The Law is a dam to hold back the sinful tendencies and natural violence that flow from the human heart. This law, then, is a kind of “sentencing guideline” for a judge in matters of court. God charges the judge with the duty of seeing that the “punishment fits the crime.”

Jesus is not condemning this law. He is condemning the Pharisees’ interpretation and use of this law. The Pharisees had taken this judicial law and wrongly applied it to the private and trivial matters of life. The Pharisees interpreted the law, “Inflict on others the same injury you receive.” They turned the “Law of Retaliation” into the “Law of Revenge.”

Jesus allows the “Law of Retaliation” to stand in its civil and public use. But in our private lives as citizens in God’s Kingdom, we must live by the general principle, “Do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.” In all standards of justice, we recognize that some evil acts are less serious (misdemeanors) than others (felonies). In verses 39-42 the examples Jesus gives are less serious acts of insult and injury—misdemeanors. Rather than resist these more inconsequential evil acts, we are to be people marked by love, not revenge (Leviticus 19:18, Romans 12:19-21, and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

20. Read the “Law of Retaliation” in Exodus 21:23-25, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21. State the “Law of Retaliation” in your own words.

Students’ answers will vary here; often the slang term “pay-backs” may be used to explain the Law of Retaliation.

21. Christians are not to resist evil in the more trivial offenses of life. However, when it comes to serious injustices and the advancement of the gospel, we are to use our powers to see that justice is done. For example, read Acts 4:1-21. Why did Peter and John “resist” the rulers of the Jewish people?

Peter and John were preaching and teaching the Gospel; they were about the business of advancing the Kingdom of God. In this case they had a “higher” duty to obey God Himself rather than God’s appointed leaders.

22. Matthew 5:41 refers to a common practice in Jesus’ day—a Roman soldier had the power to press anyone or anything into government service. We have an illustration of this in Matthew 27:32. Who was pressed into government service and for what purpose?

Simon, a man from Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus’ cross.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 20:22, 24:29, 25:21-22; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

READING: Please read Matthew 5:43-47.

Verse 43 is another saying of the Pharisees. It is a half-truth—a distortion of God’s command. The Scripture does say *“love your neighbor,”* but nowhere does it say that we are to hate our enemies. The Pharisees taught that *“love your neighbor”* (Leviticus 19:18) implied that we were to hate everyone else. Furthermore, the Pharisees misunderstood what “neighbor” meant and taught that one’s neighbor was restricted to Jews alone; all others were Gentiles, often referred to as “dogs.” Pharisees went so far as to teach that one honored God by hating all non-Jews.

Against this attitude, Jesus says, *“Love your enemies.”* This principle is taught throughout the Old Testament. Children in the Kingdom of God pattern their lives after the Father in heaven, and therefore, they love their enemies as God does. God’s love for His enemies is not an affectionate love. Rather, it is an act of God’s will to be patient with His enemies, even blessing them with sun and rain (Matthew 5:45). We are to show this kind of patience and kindness to our enemies, while we do not condone their behavior.

23. In Matthew 5:44 we are commanded by Jesus to pray for our enemies. Luke 6:27-28 is a parallel passage. There Jesus says, “Love your enemies” and then gives specifics on how we are to do this. What **three** things does Jesus teach us to show our enemies we love them?

- a. “. . . **do good** to those who **hate** you . . .”
- b. “. . . **bless** those who **curse** you . . .”
- c. “. . . **pray** for those who mistreat you.”

24. The Old Testament does not teach us to be hostile toward other races, nations, or our own enemies. Summarize the following Old Testament passages:

- a. Exodus 23:4-5:

If your enemy’s animal runs off and you find it, return it to them. If you see your enemy having a hard time carrying things, help them.

- b. Leviticus 19:18, 33-34:

Don’t seek revenge against someone who has done wrong to you. Treat people of other races and nations as one of your own kind—even to the point of loving them as you love yourself.

- c. Proverbs 24:17, 29:

Don’t be happy over your enemy’s troubles or pay them back for the evil they have done to you.

25. While God is loving toward His enemies, He also demonstrates His anger and wrath toward them (Romans 1:18-32). If one remains stubborn and unrepentant, what will God

do according to Romans 2:5-9?

God will mete out justice on the unrepentant sinner. There will be God's wrath and anger for those who follow evil.

A SUMMARY: GOD'S HIGH CALLING

Matthew 5:48

READING: Please read Matthew 5:48.

This section of the Sermon began with a devastating announcement in Matthew 5:20—*"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."* Verse 48 is a summary of the "surpassing righteousness." The summary is: *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Jesus is reminding us that the whole direction of Old Testament Law is not only to restrain evil in our hearts or to order our lives. Rather, Old Testament Law has a much higher purpose: it calls attention to the perfection of God. The Law is like a mirror. When we look at the Law we see our failure to obey it. The Law causes us to recognize our sin and guilt, as well as God's perfect holiness. When we see our sin, we see our need for Christ and His righteousness. After we understand our sin and the gift of righteousness which came through Jesus, the Law then will urge us to live a holy life of gratitude to God.

We are to model our lives after God's holy perfection. In other words, we are to model our lives after the Law of God for it is an expression of the will of God. This is the best interpretation of what it means to "be perfect": living a life that is in complete harmony with the will of God. The will of God is revealed to us in the written Word of the Old and New Testaments. The will of God is revealed to us by the Living Word—our perfectly obedient Lord, Jesus Christ. Our duty and aim is to press on toward perfection, the perfection that Christ earned for us (Philippians 3:12-14). It is Jesus whom we follow and obey. To Him be all our worship and praise!

26. What does it mean to "be perfect"?

To "be perfect" means that we are to live a life that is in complete harmony with the will of God as revealed in the Bible, especially by Jesus' example. No one can ever be perfect because we are all sinful, completely affected by sin in every way, unable to please God on our own. Christ's perfection has been credited to us. Therefore, when God looks on us, He sees Christ's perfect obedience. Christ's perfection has made us perfect in God's eyes.

27. According to Ephesians 5:1-2, we are to, *"Follow **God's example**, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of **love**, just as **Christ loved** us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Genesis 17:1; Deuteronomy 18:13; Psalm 18:32; Colossians 1:21 & 28, 2:9; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 1:10; Hebrews 10:14; James 1:4; 1 Peter 5:10; 1 John 3:6-10; 4:12.

28. While you are waiting for Lesson 3, meditate and reflect on the entire Sermon in your personal daily devotions and study time—spend extra time on Matthew 6:1-18, the passages you'll be studying in the next lesson.

Encourage the student to read through the Sermon in one sitting. The student will be asked to do this at the end of each lesson.

LESSON 3: Our Acts of Worship

INTRODUCTION

Before you begin, please read Matthew 6:1-16.

In Lesson 1, we learned about the character of Christians and their function in the world. At the center of this teaching was the Christian's hunger and thirst for righteousness. We also learned that as Christians live in the world, they will be persecuted for the righteousness they display.

In Lesson 2, we discovered that our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. In fact, the standard for our righteousness is nothing less than perfect obedience to the revealed will of God.

In Lesson 3, we will learn that our "acts" of righteousness must also exceed those of the Pharisees. Jesus teaches us this by giving us a basic principle, then illustrating it with teachings on giving, praying, and fasting.

A BASIC PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP

Matthew 6:1

Remember that the Pharisees were seen as holy men, interpreters of the Law and the Prophets. They were also seen as devout men in their religious observance, strict and exact in carrying out the acts of worship as prescribed by God. The three acts of righteousness or worship that were most important to the Pharisees were giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting.

The problem with the worship of the Pharisees was not *what* they did but *why* they did it. The Pharisees did their acts of worship before other people, to be seen by them. The goal of their worship was to win the praise of others, not give praise to God. Jesus declares that if we worship with this motivation and attitude, then the only reward we will receive is the fleeting adoration of human beings.

The general principle put forth in this verse is this: In our acts of worship we are to seek to please God and direct all glory to Him, not to ourselves or others. In other words, our worship must be God-centered, not self-centered. This is a basic principle for not just worship but for all of life.

1. What Jesus says in Matthew 6:1 at first glance may seem to be a contradiction. Read Matthew 5:16. The apparent contradiction disappears, however, when we answer the following question of both verses: Who is it that the people of the world are to see and praise as Christians live in this world?

As Christians live their lives in this world, the goal is that others will see God and praise Him.

2. The Pharisees placed great significance on where, when, and how they worshiped—hoping to be praised by others. In contrast to this, how does Jesus tell us to worship in John 4:23?

Jesus tells us that true worshipers will worship God in spirit and in truth.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7; Psalm 27:4; Ecclesiastes 5:1-2; John 4:23-24; Colossians 2:18; and Hebrews 12:28.

1. GOD-CENTERED GIVING

Matthew 6:2-4

Jesus' words "*So when you give . . .*" assume that Christians will give to the needy. Disciples of Jesus Christ are givers.

But we are not to give with the same motives as the *hypocrites*, or "play actors." In other words, when we give, we are not to "play to the audience" of those around us, making sure they hear us (announce it with trumpets) or see us (on the streets). Those who give with selfish motives like this receive their reward. The praise of others counts as "wages paid in full" for the act of giving.

In contrast to this, the true giver has an audience of One, our Father, who sees what is done in secret. The true worshiper is seen doing good works (Matthew 5:16), but they do not do good works to be seen by others.

In the context of Jesus' day, Matthew 6:3 means that our giving is to be as secret as possible—we should hardly know what we have given. We are to let God keep the records, and He will give the reward. His reward is not the simple "earned wages" of the hypocrite. Rather, our Father in heaven will lavish His grace and blessing on His children well beyond what they deserve.

3. Read Proverbs 19:17. What do you think it means to "lend to the LORD" and how do you think God will "reward" someone who gives to the poor?

This verse is teaching us that when we are kind and compassionate to the poor, demonstrated through our giving or some other means (see Proverbs 22:9; 28:8; 31:9), God views it as a gift to Himself. The Lord rewards our charitable efforts. It is not stated here what the reward will be. We cannot draw from this text that it is teaching that we will get our money back! While we do not know what the reward will be, we can have confidence that God will reward us. God's rewards can take many forms, both physical and spiritual. Encourage your student to look at all the ways God might reward charity. You might refer your students to other texts such as Proverbs 14:21 and Matthew 19:27-28; 25:31-44.

4. One of Paul's activities as he traveled from church to church was to take a collection among the Gentile churches for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Read the background to this in Acts 19:21-22, Romans 15:25-28, and 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. Then read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7.

- a. What did the members of the Macedonian churches do first that resulted in their becoming generous givers to the needy?

They gave themselves first to the Lord, that is, they devoted themselves to God. It follows, then, that everything the Macedonian believers had they really viewed as the Lord's.

- b. Why do you think taking this collection among the churches was so important to Paul?

Considering all the activities Paul did engage in on his missionary journeys, it is striking that he gave such time and importance to these collections/offerings. We see that giving to the needy is very important to Paul—especially because this kind of giving is important to God. Furthermore, we know that the unity of the church, bringing the Jew and Gentile together in Christian fellowship, was a very important matter to Paul. The famine in Palestine that caused great economic hardship for the Palestinian Christians at this time was an opportunity for Gentile Christians to show their love for their Jewish brothers.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Psalm 112:9; Proverbs 3:27-28, 22:9, 25:21-22; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, 8:11-14; and Ephesians 4:28.

2. GOD-CENTERED PRAYER

Matthew 6:5-15

To consider this section on prayer, we will divide its contents into three parts:

- A. Practicing Personal Prayer (Matthew 6:5-6)
- B. Avoiding Meaningless Prayer (Matthew 6:7-8)
- C. Following Our Model of Prayer (Matthew 6:9-15)

A. Practicing Personal Prayer

Matthew 6:5-6

Matthew 6:5-6 has the same structure and key words as the previous three verses. Pharisees sought publicity when they prayed. They prayed often and at certain mandatory times; often, they would plan to be at the most public places at the prescribed times of prayer to be seen by others.

In contrast to this, the disciple of Jesus is to go into their room to pray. This refers to a special room in the Jewish household, a storeroom that had no windows and could be locked—this room was a “secret place.” Jesus is telling us that we need to be people of private prayer so our prayers will be more likely God-centered than others-centered. We pray to an unseen Father, but He is a Father who sees all things, especially our needs. This same Father will reward the secret prayers of His sons and daughters with His abundant grace.

5. Jesus is not condemning public prayer. He is pointing out that prayer is not a forum to exhibit ourselves, but it is communion with our Father in Heaven. Prayer is best practiced in private.

- a. Read Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, and Luke 6:12. Where were some of the places Jesus practiced private prayer?

Jesus went to quiet, lonely places of solitude, often on a mountainside.

- b. Where can you practice regular private prayer?

Encourage your student to find a place of privacy for daily prayer. For some students, this may be very difficult. In that case, finding a place for private prayer should be a priority prayer request! Crossroads students that are in prison often find their private prayer place while walking in the yard, psychologically shutting distractions out as they focus on their Father in heaven. Others have benefited by “praying” the Psalms. Possibly you can share how regular, private prayer has helped you.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Genesis 24:63; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 2:11, 5:1, 34:18, 62:8; Luke 20:47; Romans 12:12; and 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

B. Avoiding Meaningless Prayer

Matthew 6:7-8

The gods of the pagans (or Gentiles, all non-Jewish nations) were seen as impersonal beings that were deaf to the plight of mankind. It was thought that they could be moved and influenced by prayers full of mechanical repetition—called *babbling*. In other words, a “slot machine” approach to prayer was established—you put enough of the right words in and answers come out. The prayers of the pagans were repetitious, mechanical, and, to a large degree, mindless.

Prayer for the citizens of God’s Kingdom is essentially different because we pray to our King, who is also our Father in heaven. Our prayers spring from this personal relationship with God. We should not try to manipulate God with meaningless, mindless repetition in order to get our prayers answered. God already knows everything we need and in His great love and concern for us, He is very willing to meet those needs.

6. We must be careful to see that Jesus is condemning meaningless prayer and a magical approach to prayer, not long prayer or repetition in prayer. In fact, we saw above (Luke 6:12) that Jesus spent whole nights in prayer. Now read Matthew 26:36-44. What was Jesus praying about here, how many times did He pray this prayer, and why did He do so?

Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39). “Cup” here refers to the outpouring of God’s wrath (see Psalm 75:8, Isaiah 51:17,22, Jeremiah 25:15-16). Jesus prayed this prayer three times. Jesus prayed this prayer three times because He was in excruciating anguish over facing death, knowing that God would not be with Him, but against Him in judgment and wrath. Even in this anguish, our Lord repeats, “Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

7. Read 1 Kings 18:16-39.

- a. In verses 26-28, whom did the people pray to, what did they say, and how long did they do this?

The people prayed to the Canaanite god Baal (and probably his “spouse” Asherah). The people simply prayed, “O Baal, answer us! They were asking Baal to send down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice on the altar. They did this from morning (verse 26) until the time for the evening sacrifice—3:00 P.M. (verse 29).

- b. How does Elijah’s prayer differ from that of the Baal-worshippers in verses 36-37?

Elijah prays a simple yet powerful prayer (verse 36). His prayer has these parts:

- **It begins with a statement of historical and covenantal fact—the Lord is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the nation Israel.**
- **It contains a statement of who Elijah was—a servant of God who does His will.**
- **Its focus is on the glory of God before the people, both in the event at the altar and the resultant repentance of the people.**

Elijah’s prayer has God-ordained results—without having to coerce God in any way.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Proverbs 15:8, 15:29, 28:9; and Ecclesiastes 5:2.

C. Following Our Model of Prayer

Matthew 6:9-15

VERSE 9a. Citizens of the Kingdom of God pray, and Jesus shows us how we should pray. This prayer, called the **Lord’s Prayer**, gives us a firm foundation upon which to build a firm and healthy prayer life.

The Lord’s Prayer can be divided into two general parts. First, the prayer starts with an *invocation*, a call of earnest desire for God to be present as we pray. Second is the body of the prayer that consists of *petitions* or requests to God.

VERSE 9b. The invocation—“Our Father in heaven . . .”

This short invocation emphasizes the intimacy of God (our Father) and His power, majesty, and authority (for He is in heaven).

“*Our Father . . .*” In Jesus’ day, it was considered disrespectful to address God in intimate terms such as “*Father*.” The Pharisees and other religious leaders emphasized God’s awesomeness, majesty, and holiness—His separateness from us rather than His desire for intimacy with us.

It was, therefore, absolutely shocking that Jesus would address God as Father. Jesus was the first one to do this in prayer; He always used this address in prayer, and here He authorizes us to use it too (see Matthew 11:25-27; Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 23:46; and John 17).

Reflect on what Jesus is asking—commanding—us to do in prayer: boldly, but reverently, enter the throne room of the Creator of the universe, as little children coming to their father. What an invitation! What a privilege!

“ . . . in heaven . . . ” To address God as our Father gives us confidence and freedom knowing that He intimately cares for us (Matthew 6:8). Knowing that our Father is “in heaven” balances our confidence and freedom with reverence as we remember our Father’s holiness, power, majesty, and authority. Thus, this simple invocation balances our intimacy and boldness with reverence and humility.

Our Father is the Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. He knows our needs. He can and will meet those needs according to His good pleasure. Praise God!

8. Jesus modeled prayer—He was a man of prayer. Read Luke 5:16 and 6:12. Describe what Jesus was doing in these verses.

Jesus went off to quiet places by Himself to pray. He did this often, and many times He did this all night. We see here that for Jesus time alone with His Father was very important and necessary.

9. In the Old Testament, the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) was seen as the place where God “lived” among His people. The specific place of God’s “dwelling” was the Holy of Holies, a part of the Temple which the people might never enter because of their sinfulness. A special curtain separated this part of the Temple from all the rest (Exodus 26:31-32). Now that Christ’s death has reconciled us to God and taken away the sin that separates us from God, the way is open for us to come directly into God’s presence.
 - a. What happened to the curtain in the Temple at Christ’s death? (See Matthew 27:51.)

At the time of Christ’s death, the curtain in the temple was torn in half from top to bottom.

- b. What is the significance of that event for us? (See Hebrews 9:11-12 and Hebrews 10:19-22.)

The curtain symbolized the wall that separated God and humanity because of our sin and God’s holiness. Jesus broke down that wall, bridging the separation by His death. We are now free to approach the Father directly; no priest is necessary to do that for us. Jesus, the Great High Priest, has made the ultimate sacrifice for us, thereby giving us free access to God in prayer.

10. Hebrews 10:19-25 discusses the significance of our free access to God. These verses give us five exhortations that begin with “Let us . . .” List these exhortations below:
 - a. **Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.**
 - b. **Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we possess.**

- c. **Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.**
- d. **Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.**
- e. **Let us encourage one another.**

VERSES 9b-10. *“your name . . . your kingdom . . . your will . . .”*

The first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer focus our attention on God. This teaches us that the adoration of God is to be our first priority in prayer. Beginning prayer with adoration of God will curtail our proneness to use prayer as a tool to manipulate God. Prayer is not an activity to bring God in line with our desires; rather, in prayer we get ourselves in line with God and His purposes.

“Hallowed be your name . . .” To “hallow” God’s name means that we know it, that we will honor it, glorify it, revere it, and make it holy.

Name here refers to the person and character of God as He has made Himself known to us. One way God has made Himself known to us is through the over 240 names and titles of God given to us in Scripture. These names are much more than designations for God, for they reveal to us who God is, His nature and character.

The meaning, therefore, of this petition is that we are to be intensely engaged in honoring and revering God openly in our lives. It was the passion of Jesus to see His Father glorified. This is to be our passion also. In this petition, we ask for the power to honor and glorify God in our lives and the power to magnify Him before others (Matthew 5:16). We are asking God to use us as His instruments to see that He is glorified, magnified, and praised in this world.

11. To “hallow” God’s name we first need to “know” His name—we need to know His nature and character. “LORD” is the covenant name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:15). Exodus 34:6-7 expands on the meaning of that name LORD. What does this name reveal to us about God’s character?

The name LORD reveals that God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. He is also a just God, punishing the guilty and their offspring.

12. It was Jesus’ passion to glorify God and hallow His name on earth. Fill in the blanks from John 17:4.

*“I have brought you **glory on earth** by **finishing (or completing)** the **work** you gave me to do.”*

“. . . your kingdom come . . .” God is King of the universe, although that Kingship is not acknowledged by all people. In this petition, we are praying that God’s Kingdom will be made visible on earth and grow as more and more people submit to His Kingship. We are also praying for the grace and power to participate in the expansion of the Kingdom by God.

Among other things, we are praying for the following:

- For the grace and power to live a life of “salt and light,” a life of good deeds, so that others might see those good deeds and praise our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).
- For the grace and power to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20), always ready to give others an account of what God has done in our life (1 Peter 3:14-16).
- In our efforts to hallow God’s name on earth, we remember we will be opposed by the kingdom of darkness. But our King is coming back someday. We must be ready; we must tell others to get ready.

13. The Kingdom of God “comes” every time another human being submits to God and pleases Him. Read Romans 14:17-18 and then circle **A or B** as the best reflection of what is taught in these verses.

- A. Those in the Kingdom of God need to be very concerned with such matters as eating and drinking.
- ☒ B. Those in the Kingdom of God need to be very concerned with righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

“ . . . your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” In heaven, when God speaks, the angels listen and obey—perfectly. In this petition, we are praying for nothing less than the power to obey God’s revealed will—complete obedience to the Word of God as we apply it to every area of our lives.

None of us can completely do God’s will without doing God’s work. As individuals, and as a united Church, we pray to do God’s work here on earth as faithfully as the angels in heaven do His work.

14. Read John 6:35-40.

- a. Why did Jesus come from heaven (verse 38)?

Jesus came to do the will of the One who sent Him, namely, God the Father.

- b. What is God’s will for you (verse 40)?

God’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life and be raised up by Jesus Christ on the last day. This is to say that God’s will for all who believe is that they have a deep abiding fellowship with Him that will result in resurrection unto glorification.

VERSES 11-15. *“Give us . . . forgive us . . . and lead us . . .”*

After we have properly focused our prayer on God and His interests, Jesus teaches us that we are also to petition our Father concerning our own needs.

“Give us today our daily bread.” This means that we are to ask God for all our daily physical

necessities such as food. This petition teaches us that our Father:

- Cares about our wellbeing.
- Wants us to live one day at a time.
- Wants us to rely on Him for our physical needs while we also rely and feed on Him for our spiritual needs (John 6:32-35).

Praying this petition thoughtfully and sincerely on a daily basis will correct our proneness to live as if we are independent rather than totally trusting and depending on God for everything in faith.

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." These verses (refer also to Matthew 5:14-15) teach us that we must pray not only for our "daily bread," but also for a "daily bath" as well. In this petition we ask God to cleanse us from our sins that we might maintain our fellowship with Him and with one another. Our "daily bath" consists of confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness. Forgiveness must happen on two fronts:

- We must *confess* our sin to God and ask for His forgiveness and cleansing. This will maintain our joy and fellowship with God.
- We must *grant forgiveness* to others as God has forgiven us (Matthew 6:14-15).

These verses do not mean that God is waiting for us to earn His forgiveness by forgiving others. Rather, our Father is teaching us this truth: We cannot experience His cleansing and forgiveness when we are not forgiving those who sin against us.

15. Fill in the blanks from 1 John 1:9:

*"If we **confess** our **sins**, he is **faithful** and **just** and will **forgive** us our sins and **purify** us from all unrighteousness."*

16. Read Matthew 18:23-35. In your own words, what is the point Jesus is making in this parable?

The parable teaches us that those who know God's forgiveness and mercy must themselves operate their lives on the same standard of forgiveness and mercy. If we have an unforgiving heart it is possibly evidence that we ourselves have not received forgiveness from God. A forgiving heart is a sign that we ourselves have new life.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." We are a weak and sinful people saved by grace. Our heavenly Father knows that if we do not wholeheartedly and prayerfully rely on Him, we will be crushed by our three great enemies: the world, the devil, and the flesh.

In this petition we express our complete dependency on God. We petition Him to protect us and empower us to resist all forms of evil.

17. Read 1 Peter 5:5-9.

- a. How is the devil described here?

The devil is described as a prowling and roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

- b. Because of the devil's activity, what are we to do?

We are to resist him, being self-controlled and alert. We are also to stand firm in the faith with the rest of those who have suffered for Christ, submit to authority, humble ourselves before God, and cast all our cares upon Him.

18. Read Ephesians 6:10-18. What part should prayer play in our warfare against the devil?

It seems that putting on the entire "armor of God" is undergirded with prayer. We are to pray under the power and guidance of the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. We are also to pray for our Christian brothers and sisters.

3. GOD-CENTERED FASTING

Matthew 6:16-18

This section of the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' third example to illustrate how we are to worship—directing glory to God and not to ourselves. Notice that these verses have the same structure and key words as Matthew 6:1-2 (on giving) and Matthew 6:5-6 (on prayer): "*When you fast . . .*"

We have seen that the Pharisees were hypocrites, or "play-actors." When it came to fasting, they over-acted their part. The Old Testament Law required a fast only on the Day of Atonement, but the Pharisees fasted twice a week (see Luke 18:11-12). Their purpose in fasting was not to please God, but to be seen and praised by others.

Fasting is refraining from food or drink, in total or in part, for a time. During this time, we seek to increase and enhance our relationship with God through activities such as prayer.

While many Christians do not fast today, fasting has a rich history in the Bible. Jesus affirmed the importance and value of fasting during His own ministry and assumes that His followers will fast when He said, "*When you fast . . .*" Jesus wants us to fast as a private, simple act of devotion to God.

19. Read Matthew 9:14-15.

- a. The Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist practiced fasting. What charge did they bring against the followers of Jesus?

They demanded to know why Jesus' disciples did not fast.

b. How did Jesus answer them?

Jesus answers the charge with an illustration from a wedding celebration: Jesus is seen as the “bridegroom” and His disciples as the wedding party (“guests”). It would be ridiculous to fast at a wedding party; it would be just as ridiculous to fast while Jesus was here in physical form on earth. However, Jesus recognizes a time when they will fast—the time between His ascension and second coming. This means that we are living in an era where fasting should be a part of our discipleship.

20. A good time to practice fasting is when we are facing crucial decisions and commitments.

a. What were the Christians in Antioch doing before and after Barnabas and Paul were called to a special ministry? See Acts 13:1-3.

They were worshipping the Lord and fasting.

b. When Paul and Barnabas returned to churches they had established in their mission trip, what activities were included in the establishment of elders at those churches? See Acts 14:21-23.

They appointed elders through prayer and fasting and then committed them to the Lord.

21. What have you learned about our acts of worship, and how has God spoken to you through your study of Matthew 6:1-18?

Student’s answers here will vary according to how the Lord has been speaking and dealing with them. Be encouraging.

22. In your study and devotion time this week, continue reading through the Sermon on the Mount—pay close attention to Matthew 6:19 to 7:6, the passages you’ll be studying next lesson.

Encourage your student to read through the Sermon on the Mount in one sitting.

LESSON 4: Staying on Track

INTRODUCTION

READING: Before you begin, please read Matthew 6:19 to 7:6.

We have been learning from the Sermon on the Mount about what it means to live as a citizen of the Kingdom of God. We have studied the citizen's character, life in the world, relationship to God's Word, and acts of worship. We have also learned that, left to ourselves, we cannot live as a citizen of God's Kingdom. In our sin, we defile the characteristics of God's Kingdom citizens, we rebel against God's rules for holy living, and our worship to Him is self-righteous and dishonoring. On our own, we are sinful, evil, and totally lost in every way. It is only through Christ that we are able to live as citizens in God's Kingdom. Through His perfect life and obedience unto death, we have been made right with God. And though we continue to fail, we have confidence that Christ never failed. He has made a way for us to live as one who belongs to God.

Jesus now turns our attention in Matthew 6:19–7:6 to a series of three warnings. Each warning begins with the words, “*Do not . . .*” (see Matthew 6:19, 6:25 and 7:1). These are Jesus' warnings against serious pitfalls in the Christian life. As we live as citizens in the Kingdom of God, Jesus wants us to be sure to stay on track. In order to stay on track in the Kingdom we must, by faith in Jesus, remain absolutely loyal to our King. Our loyalty to Him must not be spoiled by a wrong relationship to:

- Possessions (Matthew 6:19-24)
- Providing for our needs (Matthew 6:25-34)
- People (Matthew 7:1-6)

JESUS' WARNING

Against a Wrong Relationship to Possessions

READING: Please read Matthew 6:19-24.

In these verses, “*treasures on earth*” are compared with “*treasures in heaven*.” “Treasures on earth” refers to our possessions, those many gifts and resources God has given us for our constructive use and enjoyment. We know that material things, including money, are not bad in and of themselves. Rather, Jesus is warning us here about the place that we give to material possessions in our lives. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we must guard ourselves from our natural tendency to remove the King from the throne of our lives and replace Him with the treasures of earth.

Jesus gives us **five** reasons why the storing of earthly possessions is not to be a top priority in our lives.

FIRST, earthly possessions will not last (see verse 19). On the Last Day when we stand before our King, we will have nothing to show for our service to Him if we give all our energies to material possessions (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Spending our energies on acquiring possessions on this earth will end in anxiety and disappointment.

SECOND, material possessions can be stolen or ruined while spiritual treasure is lasting (see verse 20). Spiritual treasure provides for an eternity of happiness in heaven. This treasure is stored up through our obedience by faith to our King in worship (Matthew 6:6) and in every area of our life.

THIRD, our heart follows our treasure (see verse 21). As citizens of the Kingdom of God we are to be completely loyal to our heavenly Father. Jesus warns us that acquiring earthly possessions will turn our heart away from God. Here we see clearly that the real problem is not the earthly possessions, but the time and loyalty we must devote to attain them, store them, and keep them up.

FOURTH, our spiritual vision will be blurred (see verses 22-23). Jesus' comment "*The eye is the lamp of the body*" refers to the function of the eye to bring light into our existence and enable us to find our way. In order to function properly, the eye must be good, that is, it must be sound, healthy, and free of obstacles. Jesus' point here is that concerning ourselves over material possessions gives us a bad or evil eye—it clouds our vision of the Kingdom of God and His purposes for our life. Literally, the sound eye is a single eye. Christians are to have an undivided loyalty to the Kingdom of God. A good eye can also be translated as a generous eye. The Christian is to be detached from concerns about possessions. One way to gauge how we are doing in this area is to look at how generous or giving we are.

FIFTH, we cannot be owned by two masters (see verse 24). The word *serve* in this verse is literally "be a slave of." We can be a "slave" of our loving heavenly Father or a slave of money and possessions, but we cannot be the slave of both. Many people imagine that they can give limited devotion to God. But Jesus is very clear: you must serve God or money—you cannot serve both.

Money here is translated as *mammon*. As the word is used here, *mammon* refers to one's possessions, but more than that, to those possessions in which we trust for our happiness and security. What or whom are you trusting in? The citizen of the Kingdom of God trusts in God and God alone by faith. Any possessions God gives them they use to serve God. To do otherwise will lead only to a life of insecurity and anxiety.

1. History is full of people who have allowed money and possessions to rule and ultimately ruin their lives.
 - a. Read the story of Achan in Joshua 7. What was Achan's sin and what were the results of this sin?

Achan's sin was that he took articles from the city of Jericho, articles that had been devoted to the Lord (Joshua 7:1). Achan himself describes this in detail in Joshua 7:20-21:

"It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

The result of his sin was this:

- **38 men died in the attack on Ai (7:5).**
- **God and all Israel were shamed before their enemies (7:8-9).**
- **All Israel was called before God to be prosecuted for breaking their covenant with the Lord (7:10-18).**
- **Achan and his family were stoned to death (7:25).**
- **The bodies and all of Achan's possessions were burned, along with that which Achan stole (7:25).**

- b. Solomon was a man of great wisdom. Yet his heart turned away from God. Read 1 Kings 11:1-11. What caused Solomon's failure and what was the result of this failure?

Solomon loved and intermarried with 700 wives and 300 concubines, women that God had specifically told him would turn his heart away from God (11:1-3). As a result of this sin, Solomon's heart did turn away from God; he did not follow God wholeheartedly. Solomon turned both himself and the nation of Israel to syncretism—he worshiped other gods along with the worship of the Lord. This sin led God to declare, "I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates."

- c. Read the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira and what was the result of that sin?

Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and donated the proceeds to the church. They did, however, keep some of the money for themselves, while they made it appear that they had given it all to the church—Ananias and Sapphira lied about their charitable gift, and they died as a result.

2. Read 1 Timothy 6:3-10. Fill in the blanks below from 1 Timothy 6:10.

*"For the **love of money** is a root of all kinds of **evil**."*

3. Read Proverbs 23:4-5 and fill in the blanks below.

*"Do not wear yourself out to **get rich**; do not **trust (or wisdom)** your own **cleverness (or restraint)**. Cast but a glance at **riches**, and they are **gone**, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle."*

4. Read Luke 12:13-21.

- a. What is Jesus' warning in verse 15?

Jesus warns us to be on guard against all kinds of greed and living for possessions.

- b. How does the story in verses 16-21 illustrate what Jesus is trying to teach?

The parable is about a man who gives himself to money and possessions. God calls him a "fool" because none of his possessions will follow him to the grave or help him in the afterlife. The consequences of greed are an ultimately useless life on earth that results in an implied eternal separation from God.

5. Read Psalm 19:7-11.

- a. What is more precious than gold (verse 10)?

The law of the Lord is more precious than gold—His statutes, precepts, commands, and ordinances.

- b. What will bring the servant of God great reward (verse 11)?

There is great reward for the servant of God who keeps God's Law.

JESUS' WARNING

Against Worry

READING: Please read Matthew 6:25-34.

The second pitfall Jesus warns us about is worry. The root word of the English word "worry" means "to strangle." To worry or be anxious means to strangle or torment ourselves with ideas of unrealistic or non-existent dangers of the future, helplessly pondering how to reduce these dangers.

Our first concern and our complete devotion must be toward God, through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us. The pitfall Jesus warns us to avoid here is to allow concern for our material needs and for the future to form a stranglehold on our thoughts and actions, thereby removing God from His rightful place of priority in our life.

In this section, Jesus clearly states that worry is a complete waste of time and energy because our heavenly Father will provide for all our needs—He cares for us. First, Jesus simply commands the citizen of the Kingdom of God not to worry (verse 25). Then, He gives us seven reasons why we should not worry.

The “*therefore*” of verse 25 alerts us to the first reason why we are not to worry—because of what Jesus taught us in verse 24. In verse 24, Jesus taught us that it is impossible to serve God and money (or possessions). In the same way, we cannot serve God and worry at the same time. Christians serve their loving heavenly Father and give Him the throne of their life. That throne is not to be ruled by money, possessions, or worry.

Second, in verses 26-30, Jesus demonstrates to us that our Father is willing and able to care for us. If God provides food for the birds (verse 26) and adorns the lilies (verse 28-30), both seemingly insignificant creations, how much more will He take care of us, the crown of His creation and members of His family?

Third, worry has no power, according to verse 27. Worry is useless; it accomplishes nothing. Rather than lengthen our life, we know that worry may indeed shorten it!

Fourth, worry is evidence of faithlessness (verse 30b), and godlessness (verses 31-32). A characteristic of a faithless and godless person (a pagan) is their hot pursuit of things to meet their needs. A pagan knows nothing of a loving heavenly Father in whose sight His children are infinitely precious.

In contrast (verse 33), fifth, a distinctive characteristic of Christians is their consistent and constant drive to seek the Kingdom in faith. This means that the Christian is now guided by God’s rule in their life and driven by a desire to discover God’s will in the Scripture. Because the Christian has received Christ’s righteousness, they then give themselves to that righteousness—living by God’s standards.

Sixth, if we put God first in our lives, through faith in Christ, He will provide for all of our needs (verse 33b). This is a most wonderful promise—if we put the rule of God first in our lives, He will provide for all of our needs and we need not worry.

Lastly, if we are not to worry about our provisions, neither are we to worry about the future (verse 34). God is in control of all things in this world, both good and bad. And because of this, we can trust Him by faith!

6. Our confidence can grow and our worries fade as we realize that all our cares can be cast upon God. Read 1 Peter 5:7 and memorize this verse. ☐ **Check here when you’re done.**

Check required.

7. What practical instruction does the apostle Paul give us about what to do with our worries in Philippians 4:4-7?

We are not to be anxious about anything. We are to present our requests before God through prayer and petition that includes thanksgiving.

8. Read Matthew 11:28-30. A yoke is a harness that fits over the neck of an animal so that it can pull a heavy load under the direction and control of its master. Keeping this in mind,

in your own words, write a short paragraph about what you believe Jesus is teaching in Matthew 11:28-30.

Students' answers to this question will vary, possibly providing insight into the burdens they carry. Respond lovingly and appropriately. The burden Jesus is referring to here is the burden of legalism that the scribes and Pharisees placed on the people. Not only was this burden heavy because of its stringent commands, but it was ultimately useless—nothing but human religion void of divine reward (see Matthew 23:1-4). Even though Jesus' demands are even greater (Matthew 5:20), He beckons us to come under His yoke—that is, under His control as one of His disciples. In contrast to the “hard labor” of legalism, Jesus invites us to come and learn from Him. He is a gentle and humble Master. Under His yoke we will find a relationship where we are encouraged, loved and empowered. (Note: Your student will study Matthew 7:13-27 in the next lesson— there we will see a more “stern” side of Jesus. This is a good time to emphasize the tenderness and gentleness of Jesus that all of His disciples will experience as they follow Him.)

9. Many people are gripped by worry because they believe the events in their lives happen by chance, luck, or fate. In contrast to this way of life, what confidence can we gain from Romans 8:28-39?

The confidence we gain is this: If we are people who love God and delight in doing His will, all things, whether good or bad, are working under His plan for our good. God's plan for us is an outworking of His love, election, and calling. His plan results in our conforming to Christ and our eventual glorification. There is no room for worry here!

10. What confidence can we gain in our battle against worry from Luke 12:11-12?

This verse gives us confidence in a very worrisome environment—defending ourselves and the Gospel before authorities. We are promised that the Holy Spirit will be there with us and for us, teaching us what to say. By implication we can say that the Holy Spirit will be with us in all our anxious times.

11. We learn to worry less as we develop a closer relationship to our heavenly Father. What are three things you can do to develop a closer relationship to Him?

Students will have various answers here. Commonly they will write such things as prayer, Bible reading, Bible study (doing Crossroads lessons!), and church attendance. Encourage your student and possibly suggest other ways they can develop a closer relationship to God: singing, Bible memory, Bible meditation, or fellowship.

JESUS' WARNING

Concerning Judging Others

READING: Please read Matthew 7:1-6.

Citizens of the Kingdom of God seek to know and live up to God's high and holy standard (Matthew 5:48 and Matthew 6:33). This can cause one to become overly critical and judgmental with other members of the kingdom. Jesus commands us to avoid the pitfall of a judgmental attitude with the words, *"Do not judge . . ."* (Matthew 7:1).

The meaning of the word *"judge"* here does not refer to the judgment of a court of law or the use of our own critical thinking in making choices or value judgments. Rather, Jesus is speaking of a fault-finding, condemning, rigid, severe, and hypercritical type of judgment which we are prone to quickly pass on others when they aren't living up to our expectations.

Jesus makes several other points to support the command not to hypercritically judge one another. The *"or you too will be judged"* (Matthew 7:1b) reminds us that when we act judgmentally, we invite into our own lives the criticisms of both God and other people. The standard we use to judge others will be the standard God uses to judge us (Matthew 7:2). If we are overly critical with others, God will show little mercy in meting out, or giving out, His justice toward us.

If we are people who hold judgmental attitudes toward others, this is evidence that we are blind to our own failures and shortcomings. Our failures, however, are glaringly apparent to others—like a plank sticking out of our eye (Matthew 7:3-4)!

Jesus calls the person with a judgmental attitude a *hypocrite* (verse 5), a "play-actor"—just like He called the Pharisees when He denounced them. Overly critical people often portray their criticisms as acts of kindness and goodness when in fact they are evil and motivated by an evil intent. Beyond that, the hypercritical rarely apply their own standards of judgment to themselves. All of us need to *"take the plank out of [our] own eye"* (verse 5).

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his commentary on these verses, concludes:

"When a man has truly seen himself he never judges anybody else in the wrong way. All his time is taken up in condemning himself, in washing his hands and trying to purify himself. There is only one way of getting rid of the spirit of censoriousness and hypercriticism, and that is to judge and condemn yourself. It humbles us to the dust, and then it follows of a necessity that, having thus gotten rid of the beam out of our own eyes, we shall be in fit condition to help the other person, and to get the little mote (or speck) that is in his eye."

In light of verses 1-5, verse 6 is almost shocking. Jesus is teaching here that while Christians are to avoid hypercritical judgment and condemnation of others, they are still to judge, however, in another sense. That is, Christians are to make rational judgments. They are to use discernment and they are to make value judgments.

Jesus' original hearers, the Jews, would be deeply affected by His illustration of His point in verse 6. It was unthinkable for a Jew to give what is sacred, holy, and consecrated to God to unclean animals like dogs. And who would ever give priceless pearls to pigs?

Jesus' point is that we are to use discernment when handling the precious gifts of the Kingdom of God which we possess. The good news—or Gospel—and the good gifts of the

Kingdom of God are to be given to those who can appreciate them. We are to withhold the valuable teaching and benefits of the Kingdom from those who give clear and consistent evidence of rejecting the gifts of God with scorn and contempt.

12. God takes our sin of judging others very seriously. In Psalm 50:19-22, God is speaking. If we slander other people, what will God eventually do (see verse 21)?

God says He will accuse and rebuke us.

13. James echoes the teaching of Jesus in James 4:11-12.

- a. Fill in the blanks: He says, “*Brothers and sisters, **do not slander** one another*” (verse 11a).
- b. What are some reasons James gives for this command? (Note: The law here can be interpreted as the law of love.)

James gives this command because:

- **To slander someone breaks the law of love.**
- **Slander is speaking evil against someone—it is motivated by envy and comes from the devil.**
- **The slanderer sets themselves against and above the Law of God.**
- **The slanderer sets themselves against God, the One and Only Judge and Lawgiver.**

14. Matthew 7:6 shows us that we are to be discerning.

- a. What does Titus 3:10-11 tell us to do about a divisive person?

Warn the divisive person up to two times, then have nothing to do with them.

- b. What does Matthew 10:11-16 tell us to do with those who will not value the gifts and words of the Kingdom?

If a person or group will not value the gifts and words of the Kingdom of God, we are to leave them—at the loss of our presence and, more importantly, at the loss of the presence of Jesus whom we represent. To “shake the dust off your feet” was a symbolic way of showing that the home or town involved was pagan, polluted and under God’s judgment.

15. Read Acts 13:13-48. How does this account illustrate the principle in Matthew 7:6 (pay close attention to Acts 13:46-48)?

Paul regularly announced the Gospel first to the Jews in any place he endeavored to minister (see Acts 13:5; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,15; 19:8). If the Jews rejected the Gospel, Paul removed himself and went to the Gentiles in that place.

Jesus warns us in these verses against treasuring possessions, worrying, and judging others because He knew that, by nature, humans would have a lifelong struggle with them. He knew that all people are sinful and will never overcome their desire for earthly things, their struggle with worry, and their judgmental attitudes. But this was still God's standard for His citizens; God still required obedience and holy living. So God, while we were still sinning and disobeying Him, sent Jesus to die for us (Romans 5:8). In His perfect and obedient life, Jesus fulfilled God's standard for living, *"so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

16. What did you learn in this lesson that will encourage you as you seek to "stay on track" in your spiritual life?

Here again students will answer in various ways. Be alert to ways you can encourage, help, and pray for your student.

17. Keep reading and meditating on the Sermon. Focus mostly on Matthew 7:7-29, which you will study in your next lesson.

Encourage your student to be reading through the Sermon on the Mount in one sitting.

LESSON 5: Committing to the Kingdom

INTRODUCTION

READING: Before you begin, please read Matthew 7:7-29.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has instructed us in the high and holy calling of the citizen of the Kingdom of God. In this closing section of the Sermon, Jesus gives us:

- A powerful call to prayer (Matthew 7:7-11)
- A powerful summary of the sermon (Matthew 7:12)
- A powerful call to commitment to the Kingdom of God (Matthew 7:13-27)

Please begin this last section of the Sermon on the Mount with a prayer that you will hear, understand, accept, and act upon Jesus' teaching to you in this section of the Sermon on the Mount.

A POWERFUL CALL TO PRAYER

READING: Please read Matthew 7:7-11.

VERSES 7-8. "Ask . . . seek . . . knock . . ." are all metaphors for prayer. Jesus' repetition of these words in these two verses suggests to us the utmost importance of prayer in our lives. These words are also *imperatives*, meaning they are commands to pray. The use of the present tense for these words in the original Greek language indicates that our prayers must be sincere, continuous, and persistent. These verses, then, are a powerful call to prayer.

This call to prayer comes at a strategic point in the sermon. As one studies the sermon section by section, a deep sense of unworthiness and the seeming impossibility of the demands of the Kingdom of God can be overwhelming. These verses assure us that God wants and wills to provide all we need to progress in the Kingdom. The first thing we have to do is ask, seek, knock in faith, and God will provide. The most important thing we can do is pray.

VERSES 9-11. Jesus would not have us labor under the illusion that persistent prayer is necessary to overcome an unwillingness in our Father in heaven to grant us good gifts. God does not "play" with us any more than a loving earthly father (whose every act is tainted with sin) would play harmful and unkind jokes on one of his children. Our Father in heaven has only good in mind and in store for us (Psalm 85:12, Lamentations 3:25, and James 1:17). All we need to do is pray in faith with consistency and persistence.

1. Read Luke 11:9-13, a parallel passage to this section of the Sermon. According to verse 13, what special good gift is God willing to bestow on His children?

God will bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

2. Jeremiah 29:10-13 and Deuteronomy 4:28-31 are also promises that God will listen to the prayers of His repentant children. Fill in the blanks from Jeremiah 29:11-13.

*"For I know the **plans** I have for **you**," declares the **LORD**, "plans to **prosper** you and not to **harm** you, plans to give you **hope** and a **future**."*

3. Matthew 7:7-11 should not be interpreted to mean that God will give us anything and everything we want. These verses assume that we have understood the rest of the Sermon—we are no longer self-centered but God-centered in our Christian living and prayer life. We now pray for what God wants because what He wants, we want. Read James 4:1-3.

- a. Describe the kind of people James is speaking about here.

James is speaking about people who profess to be Christians yet they are filled with envy that demonstrates itself in fighting and quarrelling. Furthermore these people are selfish pleasure seekers.

- b. Describe the kind of prayer life they have.

James describes two aspects of their prayer life:

- **They rarely ask God for things in prayer.**
- **When they do ask, it is with wrong (selfish) motives.**

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Job 8:5-6, Isaiah 55:6, Ephesians 3:20, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, and Hebrews 4:16

A POWERFUL SUMMARY OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

READING: Please read Matthew 7:12.

The first reference to the "*Law and the Prophets*" in the Sermon on the Mount was in Matthew 5:17-21. These verses marked the beginning of Jesus' teaching on how we ought to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Now, Jesus marks the close of His ethical teaching with another reference to the "*Law and the Prophets*" in Matthew 7:12. The "so" or "therefore" of this verse refers to everything Jesus has taught since Matthew 5:17-21. As such, this verse is a powerful summary of the entire ethical teaching of the Sermon and the righteous living that the citizen of the Kingdom is to display.

Jesus says, "*Do to others what you would have them do to you.*" This statement has been called the "Golden Rule." Prior to Jesus, this rule had been stated negatively in many religions and

cultures—"Do not do to others what you yourself dislike." Notice that the slight change Jesus makes in the wording of this rule powerfully changes it. He moves the focus of the rule from our own selves and our needs to others and their needs. As you remember, citizens of the Kingdom of God are never self-centered. Rather, they are God-centered and other-centered; they order their lives according to the Golden Rule.

The word "*for*" introduces the reason why we are to live by the Golden Rule. Many times we obey rules because of fear of punishment. But Jesus gives us another reason to obey the Golden Rule—conduct guided by this rule is the very goal and essence of the Law and the Prophets. If we conduct our lives according to the Golden Rule, we will find a measure of fulfillment and peace because we are living as our Father created us to live—God-centered and other-centered, fulfilling the Law and the Prophets. Also, we will have joy because our Father will be well pleased with us.

4. Another summary of the Law and the Prophets is given in Matthew 22:36-40. Try to summarize these verses in one word.

Love.

5. Read Romans 13:3-10.
 - a. What continuing debt do we have as Christians?
We are to love one another.
 - b. What one rule sums up the entire law of God?

Love your neighbor as yourself.

- c. Fill in the blanks below.

*"Therefore **love** is the fulfillment of the **law**." (verse 10)*

6. Please read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a. ☐ **Check here when you're done.**

Check required.

7. Now write out your own summary of the Law and the Prophets in the space below.

Students' answers will vary here. We are looking for their own expression of love both for God and for others.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39; Luke 6:27-36; John 13:34; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; and James 2:8

A POWERFUL CALL TO COMMITMENT

READING: Please read Matthew 7:13-27.

The Sermon on the Mount closes with four warnings that are also four calls to commitment. The warnings and commitments are presented in contrasting pairs.

- Verses 13-14—Two Ways
- Verses 15-20—Two Trees
- Verses 21-23—Two Professions
- Verses 26-27—Two Builders

We will study each of these sections below.

Two Ways—Matthew 7:13-14

Having completed the ethical teaching of the Sermon, Jesus now presents us with a clear picture. Before us there are two gates, two roads, and two destinations. Up until now, we may have been under the impression that there was only one way—a *broad way* that bustles with the press of the crowd. Indeed, it is the way we are going. Apart from Christ, we follow our natural instincts and the crowd down the wrong road. But through Christ, the Spirit has opened our deaf ears and blind eyes and now we see the King of the universe calling us to turn toward His small gate and narrow way.

Because of Christ, the citizen of the Kingdom of God can now by faith decide to *enter the narrow way*. This is the way to meaningful and eternal life. But this way is restrictive for at least three reasons.

- The gate is as narrow as Jesus Himself. He alone is the Gate (John 10:7). All who desire to attain citizenship in the Kingdom of God must turn to Jesus alone in repentance and faith. This is the only way to meaningful and eternal life.
- The way is narrow because the boundary of the road is the Law of God. It is paved thickly with the decrees and will of God. In other words, as one walks this narrow way, they walk under the will of God. All other loyalties are given up. Christ alone sits upon the throne in the heart of the citizen of the Kingdom of God.
- The narrow way is specifically a way of persecution, hardship, opposition, and tribulation. Evidently the broad and narrow ways seem at times so close together that those who tread the narrow way are subject to the attacks and deceit of Satan and those who follow him on the broad road to destruction. But those who will but keep on the narrow way with their eyes fixed on Jesus will reach the destination of eternal life.

8. Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20. Here Israel is engaged in renewing their commitment to God. Answer the following questions.

- a. What are the “two ways” set forth in verse 15?

There is the way of life and prosperity, or of death and destruction.

- b. For those who choose God’s way, what command are they to follow? (verse 16)

. . . to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commands, decrees and laws . . .

- c. What will be the reward of those who faithfully follow in God’s way?

. . . then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you . . .

- d. What punishment does disobedience to God’s way bring?

The disobedient will live a life under the curse of God that will lead to destruction.

9. The Greek word that is translated *narrow* in Matthew 7:14 is related to the Greek word for tribulation and hardship used in Acts 14:22. With what words did Paul and Barnabas encourage and strengthen the new disciples of Jesus Christ in Acts 14:21-22?

We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.

10. It is particularly fashionable today to believe that “all religions are ultimately the same” and that they all lead to some kind of eternal life of bliss. This passage speaks directly against such a teaching. Jesus is clear that He alone is the way to salvation and eternal life. Jesus also teaches this in John 10:7-10 and John 14:6. Write out John 14:6 in the space below.

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: John 10:9; Acts 4:12, 10:43; Ephesians 2:18; 1 Timothy 2:5; and Hebrews 9:8, 10:19-22.

Two Trees—Matthew 7:15-20

VERSE 15. Every king must communicate with his subjects. In the Kingdom of God, one way God communicates with His people is through prophets (Romans 1:1-2 and Hebrews 1:1). We often think of prophets only as those who foretell the future. In the Bible, however, prophets have a much broader calling—they are called by God to speak for God. Prophets were to speak whatever God commanded them to speak, no matter how awful the message. Sometimes the message from God was about the future, but more often the prophet was called to pronounce God’s blessing and curses upon His people for either obeying or disobeying His commands.

The Old Testament has a rich history of prophets—both true and false. False prophets claimed to be speaking for God, but in reality they were speaking their own words, words they thought people wanted to hear.

Here Jesus warns us that we must still today watch for false prophets. False prophets will often seem at first glance to be “one of the sheep,” that is, fellow citizens of the Kingdom of God. But nothing could be further from the truth. They are ferocious wolves in sheep’s clothing. Their goal is to destroy the Kingdom; their weapon is their deceitful mouth; their message is often the declaration of an alternate route in the Kingdom of God, a route that turns out to be nothing but the broad way that leads to destruction (see 2 Peter 2:1 and 1 John 4:1).

VERSES 16-20. People who declare they are speaking for God must be tested. The test Jesus gives us is the “fruit test”—*“by their fruit you will recognize them.”*

In the countryside where Jesus was preaching, there grew a certain variety of thorn bushes and thistles that at first glance seemed to produce fruit like grapes and figs. Upon closer inspection, however, one could not be deceived—the fruit was not what it first seemed to be. This is the way it is with people. People, like plants and trees, bear fruit after their own kind, fruit that is either good or bad. Jesus is telling us that we must test the messages of the Kingdom messengers by watching their fruit—their words and actions, their preaching and practice. After careful “fruit inspection” we will not be deceived.

The “fruit test” is not quick or easy, but it is sure. Once a false messenger is discovered, we are to reject their message. If we do not, we will run the risk of joining this messenger as they are cut down and thrown into the fire of eternal destruction.

11. The full office of prophet as we have it in the Old Testament no longer exists. Read Matthew 5:17-18, Hebrews 1:1-3, and Ephesians 2:19-21. Who was the last prophet? What makes Him greater than all the other prophets?

Jesus is the Last Prophet in the fullest sense of the word. He is also the Greatest Prophet because:

- **He came to fulfill, carry out and complete all that the Law and Prophets spoke about.**
- **The office of apostle and prophet is built upon Him. It is He who joins the entire Church together.**
- **Jesus’ revelation is superior to all of the other prophets because He is an exact, authentic representation of God—He is God!**

12. While Jesus has fulfilled the office of prophet, God still speaks to us through messengers today. The early messengers after Jesus’ ascension were the apostles. From them we have gained a rich history in the Church of elders and teachers who both teach and apply the Word of God to our lives. The New Testament makes very clear that these elders and teachers must be tested. For example, read what Paul has to say in Acts 20:17-38. Then answer the following questions.

- a. Who is Paul speaking to? (verse 17)

Paul is speaking to the elders of the church in Ephesus.

- b. What else does Paul call these men? (verse 28)

Paul calls them overseers and shepherds of the Church of God.

- c. What does Paul call the people in the Ephesian church? (verse 28)

Paul refers to the Church as a flock of sheep.

- d. What does Paul warn will happen in the Ephesian church? (verses 29-30)

Paul warns that savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. These “wolves” are false teachers who will distort the truth and draw many away.

13. The apostle John gives us another test to apply to teachers in the Church. Read 1 John 4:1-3. In your own words, describe the test he gives.

John tells us that one way to test a teacher is to see if they believe that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine. Your students may find different and interesting language for this doctrine. Give gentle help and extra instruction if necessary.

14. Read the short book of Jude. ☐ **Check here when you're done.** This book is written as a defense against false teachers. Verses 20-23 give us some practical help on how to make progress in our Christian life (contend for the faith, verse 3). What do these verses teach you?

Check required.

We make progress in the Christian faith by . . .

- **Building ourselves up in the faith—knowing and holding on to the pure message of the Gospel with all its implications for our lives.**
- **Praying in the Holy Spirit—praying according to the prompting and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and through His power.**
- **Keeping ourselves in God's love—obeying God's commands out of love for Him (see John 15:10).**
- **Waiting for and focusing on the mercy that will be shown us on the Last Day.**
- **Dealing mercifully, straightforwardly, and patiently with those who have been succumbing to false teaching.**

Two Professions—Matthew 7:21-23

Here are three of the most solemn verses in Scripture. They warn us against being deceived

that we are walking in the narrow way (Matthew 7:13-14) when we are indeed on the broad way to destruction.

Concerning the profession of those described in these verses, Jesus says two things:

- They make a fervent and repeated profession with their mouths that Jesus is Lord (verses 21 and 22). This means that they know Jesus is God and that they claim to have a Master/servant relationship with Him. In other words, they profess to be intimately following God on the narrow way that leads to life.
- They are people of good works, miraculous works. These works are done in Jesus' name, meaning that they are done under His authority and with His power.

Against these seemingly wonderful citizens of the Kingdom of God, Jesus makes four professions, or judgments, of His own:

- These people have not met a requirement to enter the Kingdom of God, to do the will of My Father in heaven. Evidently these people could not sincerely pray, *"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10). The motivation behind their profession of words and deeds is to do their own will—they are self-centered and not God-centered in all they do.
- These people never had a personal relationship with Jesus, for He says to them, *"I never knew you."* To know Jesus in the sense meant here is to have a close, intimate relationship with Him—to love Him. Jesus knows our hearts and motivations. All will be turned away from Him who do not sincerely love Him.
- Jesus calls these people *"evildoers,"* that is, they are people who practice lawlessness. The true citizen of the Kingdom of God delights in God's Law—both to know it and do it. All those who ignore, subvert, and hate the law of God are in reality on the road to destruction.
- Jesus says, *"Away from me"* to these people. This disturbing, chilling declaration shows that Jesus Himself will decide who enters the state of eternal life and who will be banished to hell.

These are sobering words. We may be tempted to apply them to someone else. Instead, they should cause us to search our souls and plead with God to root out any self-centered, lawless way in us.

15. If we listen to this Sermon with its warnings, we will never hear Jesus say to us:

*"Away from me, you evildoer" but rather, "**Well done, good and faithful** servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness" (Matthew 25:21).*

16. Read 1 John 3:4. Here we are given a definition of sin. Fill in the blank below.

Sin is **lawlessness**.

17. Read Psalm 119:1-24. In the space below, describe how the author of this psalm feels about the Law of God.

The Psalmist is passionate about the Law of God. He knows that fully obeying God's Law is the only way of blessing and life. To the Law he entrusts his entire life and gives all his energy. He is consumed with the Law of God; it is his delight and counsel.

18. This section of the Sermon makes it very clear that we must have an relationship with Jesus in order to enter the Kingdom of God. Read 1 John 2:3-6 and answer the following questions.

a. On what basis can we be sure that we know God? (verse 3)

We can be sure that we know God if we obey His commands.

b. If we claim to know God but do not obey His commands, what are we? (verse 4)

People like this are liars; the truth is not in them.

c. How do we know that we are in Christ (that is, that we intimately know Him)? (verse 6)

We can be sure that we know Christ if we are daily living a life characterized by obedience to Him.

19. Based on the study above, mark each statement below as either true (T) or false (F).

a. **F** All people will be saved.

b. **F** As long as a person has asked Jesus into their heart, they can live any way they want to and still expect to be saved.

c. **T** The real evidence that we are saved, or that we are citizens of the Kingdom of God, is that we, through faith in Jesus Christ, obey God and do His will out of gratitude to Christ.

Two Builders—Matthew 7:24-27

Everyone that lived in Palestine knew how the unpredictable winds and rains of the region could result in flash floods that could overtake the land. These storms would uncover the quality of the work of any builder. Wise builders founded their buildings upon unshakable bedrock, a solid anchor against any of the catastrophic forces of the weather. On the other hand, a seemingly solid house could be shown for what it really was in these turbulent storms—handiwork of a fool that ended in nothing but a great crash of destruction.

In this parable, the floods and winds represent the oppression, tribulation, and trials of this world and the torrent of final judgment that will fall upon all people. The wise builder is that person

who both hears the words of Jesus and puts them into practice—they can withstand anything! The foundation of a wise person's life is Christ Himself, and on that foundation they build with whole-hearted allegiance a life of Christian character and practice.

The foolish builder represents those who hear Christ's words but don't put them into practice. Their allegiance to Christ goes only as far as their ears to their head and never out to action in their limbs! If they have a faith at all, it is merely an intellectual faith that will disappoint them throughout their life at every trial and tribulation, ending in a final thunder crash on the Last Day of judgment.

Notice that Jesus here specifically identifies "*these words of mine*" (the words of the Sermon) with the will of God (Matthew 7:24). While many Christians anguish over discovering the will of God for their life, we should listen to these words and begin to practice the clearly revealed will of God spelled out in the Sermon on the Mount.

20. Read Isaiah 28:14-18. Here Isaiah says that the people of Israel are deceived by thinking they have built their lives on strong foundations for the day of trouble, when in reality they live on faulty foundations that will lead to destruction (verses 14-15). Then God says in verse 16 that He will lay a new cornerstone for a sure foundation in Zion. Read 1 Corinthians 3:11 and 1 Peter 2:4-7 and write down whom this is referring to.

These passages are referring to Jesus Christ.

21. According to Matthew 7:24, how can we know if we are building on the correct foundation? Also see Matthew 7:21.

We can be sure we are building on the foundation of Jesus Christ when we are consistently hearing and practicing the words of Jesus, that is, doing the will of God.

22. James 1:22-25 and 2:14-22 also discuss this subject of hearing the Word of God and doing it.
- a. Like the foolish builder, who also hears the word of God but does not do it? (2:19)

The demons hear the Word of God, but they do not do it.

- b. In James 1:22 we are commanded to not only listen to God's Word, but to:

*"Do **what it says**."*

- c. What will be the result in a person's life if they listen to God's Word and do it? (James 1:25)

The person that listens to and does the Word of God will be blessed in what they do.

(Optional) Verses for **IN-DEPTH** study: Psalm 119

THE CONCLUSION OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

READING: Please read Matthew 7:28-29.

The crowds were amazed at both the Teacher and the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Amazement should be our response, too—a response that leads to worship of and complete obedience to Christ. Through the entire Sermon, Jesus has been explaining and calling us to a life of true righteousness as citizens of the Kingdom of God, through radical submission to His Lordship. If we hear and do this, it will lead to a life of blessing in this broken world, and to eternal blessedness in heaven.

But what should amaze us the most is knowing that our Teacher—Jesus Christ—followed His own teaching of God’s Law perfectly. Jesus knew that we wouldn’t be able to follow His teaching perfectly like He would. He knew that we were totally lost in our sin and incapable of doing any good, let alone living a life of true righteousness, on our own.

After studying the Sermon on the Mount, do you feel a sense of hopelessness realizing that, left to yourself, you cannot live up to God’s standards? Are you struck by God’s perfection and holiness and your sin and misery? Are you even more amazed at Jesus Christ and what He did for you? After studying God’s Law in the Sermon on the Mount, you can have hope in the midst of your own hopelessness, because that hope comes from Christ, the sinless One. Stand amazed and rejoice in His perfect righteousness which has made you right with God.

Because of Christ, we can now enter and continue on the narrow way of the Kingdom of God. As we grow, let us encourage one another. If we fall, let us pray, help one another and turn from our wicked ways. Then, on that Last Day, only because Christ has fully and completely atoned for our sins and made a way for us, we shall hear our Lord’s declaration, *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”*

23. Describe one way that the study of the Sermon on the Mount has changed not only the way you think, but also the way you act.

Students will vary in what they express here. Be encouraging to them. Also encourage your student for finishing this course!

24. While waiting for the return of this lesson, please read through the Sermon on the Mount one last time. Take some time to reflect on all God has taught you through this portion of Scripture.

No mentor comment necessary.



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

cpministries.org