

DAVID GUZIK



# The King's Kingdom

A Deeper Look at  
The Sermon on the Mount

*Enduring Word Bible Commentary*



# The King's Kingdom

A Deeper Look at  
The Sermon on the Mount

DAVID GUZIK

Enduring Word presents the Bible commentary of David Guzik.  
www.enduringword.com - ewm@enduringword.com

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way by any means— electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise— without the prior permission of the copyright holder, except as provided by USA copyright law.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible, copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publisher. Translational emendations, amplifications, and paraphrases are by the author.

© 2022 Enduring Word. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-939466-73-0

Enduring Word  
5662 Calle Real #184  
Goleta, CA 93117



## Introduction

It has been said that one way to recognize the Kingdom of God is to look for the people who recognize God as King, and who enjoy the benefits of His reign.

Some people don't want the Kingdom of God - they prefer to think they rule their world. Others say they want the Kingdom of God, but what they really mean is they want *their* idea of a kingdom, not *God's* idea of His Kingdom.

I believe that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is one of the best explanations of the Kingdom of God. Jesus used this sermon to explain to His disciples and potential disciples what His Kingdom was all about, and to correct many misunderstandings about His Kingdom.

I pray that your time spent thinking carefully about the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount will help you be a happier and better citizen of His Kingdom.

In Jesus' Name,  
David Guzik



## Chapter 1 He Opened His Mouth and Taught Them



---

**And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying . . .**

(Matthew 5:1–2)

Matthew had written earlier that “great multitudes followed” Jesus (Matt. 4:25). In response to the crowds, Jesus “**went up on a mountain,**” not to remove Himself from the multitudes but to teach them in His Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus gave the same basic teaching, on another occasion, to “a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases” (Luke 6:17). On that occasion Jesus “*lifted up His eyes toward His disciples,* and said . . .” (Luke 6:20). It is much the same in Matthew; this sermon was spoken to Jesus’ disciples—not just the twelve but all those who followed Jesus.

Therefore, Jesus spoke this message “**on a mountain**”—in public. Jesus didn’t have two sets of doctrine, one for the many and another for the few. His highest teaching was to be heard by anyone who would listen.

As He spoke, Jesus took the common posture of a teacher: “**when He was seated . . .**” Then “**He opened His mouth.**” Jesus spoke with energy, projecting His thoughts with earnestness.

What Jesus said in this message has long been recognized as the sum of His ethical teaching. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us how to live. It has been said that if we took all the good advice about how to live ever uttered by philosophers and psychiatrists and counselors, took out the foolishness, and boiled it down to the essentials, we would be left with a poor imitation of this great message by Jesus.

In His sermon, Jesus presented a radically different agenda than what the nation of Israel had expected from the Messiah. He did not present the political or material blessings of the Messiah’s reign. Instead, Jesus expressed the spiritual implications of His rule in our lives. This great message tells us how we will live when Jesus is our Master.

The Sermon on the Mount does not deal with salvation as such. Rather, it lays out for the disciple how regarding Jesus as King translates into daily living.



It may be that the Sermon on the Mount was Jesus' "standard" sermon, and its themes were the core of His itinerant message. When Jesus preached to new audiences, He may have preached this sermon or used themes from it.

Yet in this sermon Jesus also gave His disciples the message He wanted them to carry to others. William Barclay says that the verb translated "**taught**" is in the imperfect tense and "describes repeated and habitual action, and the translation should be: 'This is what He used to teach them.'"

It's time for us to stand as students while Jesus sits as a teacher before us. Jesus wants to open His mouth and speak with authority to us—if we will only listen.

## Chapter 2 From Curse to Blessing



---

### **Blessed are the . . .** (Matthew 5:3)

The first portion of the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5:1–12) is known as the Beatitudes, or “the blessings.” But this section can also be understood as giving the believer his “be-attitudes”—the attitudes he should *be*. In the Beatitudes Jesus set forth both the nature and the aspirations of citizens of His kingdom: they both *have* and *are learning* these descriptions of character.

*All* these character traits are marks and goals of *all* Christians. We can’t major in one to the exclusion of others, as is the case with spiritual gifts. If someone claims to be a Christian but displays and desires none of these traits, we may rightly wonder about that person’s salvation, because he or she does not have the character of a kingdom citizen. On the other hand, if someone claims to have mastered these attributes, we may question that person’s honesty.

Jesus began these famous words by simply saying, “**Blessed are . . .**” The idea behind the ancient Greek word “**blessed**” is “happy,” not in the modern sense of feeling comfortable or entertained but in the truest, godliest sense of the word. This same word “blessed” is applied to God in 1 Timothy 1:11: “the blessed God.” William Barclay said that this word “describes that joy which has its secret within itself, that joy which is serene and untouchable, and self-contained, that joy which is completely independent of all the chances and changes of life.”

Wouldn’t everyone want that kind of happiness? Jesus’ blessing goes beyond getting an adrenaline jolt or being entertained out of boredom. The Beatitudes describe a life that is truly blessed, a happiness that can’t be changed by economic bad news or personal tragedy. They speak of life fulfillment that comes from right relationship with God and others, not from power or things.

Jesus understood blessing. On the day of judgment, He will say to His people, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). In other words, He will judge between the blessed and the cursed. Thus, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus could explain the requirements for being blessed. Not only did He understand blessing, but no one was ever blessed more than Jesus was. He knew what goes into a blessed life.

Notice that Jesus said, “**blessed are**” and not “blessed will be.” Jesus was describing a deep happiness that can be enjoyed – yes, in eternity, but also now.

The last idea of the Old Testament is that of a curse: “. . . lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:6). But it is wonderful that the first word of this opening sermon of Jesus’ ministry is “**blessed.**”

Sin has cursed the earth—its ecology, its politics, its economy, even people’s thoughts and dreams. Yet if we will listen, Jesus shows us a “**blessed**” way—how to live as citizens of His kingdom instead of citizens of this cursed earth. It’s time for us to listen and be blessed.

## Chapter 3

### Having Nothing, Having Everything



---

**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**  
(Matthew 5:3)

Not many people would choose poverty over riches. Yet Jesus told us that there is a special blessing for those who are “**poor**”—that is, “**poor in spirit.**”

The “**poor in spirit**” recognize that they have no spiritual assets; they know that they are spiritually bankrupt. The ancient Greek had a word for the working poor and another for the truly destitute. Jesus used the word for the destitute here. It indicates someone who must beg for whatever he has.

To be “**poor in spirit**” is not to be without value. Instead, it is to be in spiritual need. Many people think that the key to spirituality is found deep inside oneself. They dig deep into their inner beings, hoping that the answers are there. Those who are “**poor in spirit**” have given up on that. They know that if there is no money in the bank account, then no matter how much they look at their bank statements, they won’t find anything. They need something from *outside* themselves.

True poverty of spirit cannot be artificially induced by self-hatred. Only the Holy Spirit and our response to His working in our hearts can bring it about. To become poor in spirit is the work of God in us, and we must respond to that work.

This beatitude is first because poverty of spirit is where we must start with God. It is like a ladder, with the first step close enough to the ground that anyone can start climbing. Jesus didn’t start with “blessed are the pure” or “blessed are the holy” or “blessed are the spiritual.” He started with something everyone can be—“**poor in spirit.**” The first step, the foundation to a genuinely blessed life, is something that everyone can have—because it is *nothing*.

Charles Spurgeon said it well: “Not what I have, but what I have not, is the first point of contact between my soul and God.”

The call to be “**poor in spirit**” is placed first for a reason: the blessings and commands to come cannot be fulfilled by one’s own strength but only by a beggar’s reliance on God’s power. Until we sense our own poverty, we will never mourn over our sin or be meek and merciful toward others or hunger and thirst after righteousness.

What do the “**poor in spirit**” gain? “**Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**” Poverty of spirit is an absolute prerequisite for receiving the kingdom of heaven. As long as we hold onto the dream of using our own spiritual resources, we will never receive from God what we absolutely need to be saved.

The “**poor in spirit**” are lifted from their low place and set into God’s royal kingdom. The idea of being “**poor in spirit**” sounds as if a person has nothing; yet in fact he or she inherits all things. It is indeed a happy poverty, because it is rewarded richly. God promises great things to those who stop looking for them within themselves and look to Him instead.

## Chapter 4 A Good Mourning



---

**Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**  
(Matthew 5:4)

If we were to make a list of good things, it is not likely that mourning would be on the list. Yet Jesus, in the beginning of His great Sermon on the Mount, said that there is a particular blessing set aside for **“those who mourn.”**

In the vocabulary of the ancient Greek text, Jesus’ words bring an even greater challenge. There were several words for “mourning” in that ancient Greek language, but the one used here is especially intense. According to the historical and grammatical scholar William Barclay, “The Greek word for *to mourn*, used here, is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language. It is the word which is used for mourning for the dead, for the passionate lament for one who was loved.”

What does Jesus expect us to mourn over? No doubt the answer is found in the progression of the Beatitudes. First we recognize our poverty of spirit: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). Then, having recognized our poverty of spirit, we are to mourn over it.

Jesus did not speak of a casual sorrow for the consequences of our sin but of a deep grief before God over our fallen condition. We are to weep for the low and needy condition of both the individual and society that has been caused by sin. **“Those who mourn”** actually **“mourn”** over sin and its effects.

Several years after Jesus said these words, the apostle Paul described this mourning as “godly sorrow” that “produces repentance leading to salvation” (2 Cor. 7:10). It isn’t that the mourning itself is good; rather, the result of it is good. It leads to repentance and salvation.

But Jesus promised that those who **“mourn”** over their sin and their sinful condition **“shall be comforted.”** God allows this grief in our lives as a path, not a destination. He never wanted us to be stuck in mourning but to use it as the pathway to receive His comfort.

Thus far we have two pearls on a beautiful necklace: first poverty of spirit, then the right reaction to that poverty—genuine mourning over our condition. Such an attitude contradicts the dispassionate coolness attractive to many in the modern age. This attitude of mourning knows how important it is to be right and reconciled with God. It’s another way of expressing the feeling, “God, I want You.”

Yet it even goes deeper. Those who “**mourn**” can know something special of God—what Paul calls “the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). They can also experience closeness to the “Man of sorrows,” who was “acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). And they can look for others who mourn and point them to Jesus—helping them find blessing and comfort in the midst of mourning. It can be a mourning unto good instead of despair.

## Chapter 5 The Unappreciated Virtue



---

**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**  
(Matthew 5:5)

In this great section of the Sermon on the Mount known as the Beatitudes, Jesus first directed us to poverty of spirit. Then He pointed us toward mourning over our poverty of spirit and the effects of man's spiritual bankruptcy on both individuals and society. Now Jesus proclaimed the blessedness of meekness.

The word "meek" comes from the ancient Greek word *praus*. According to many (including the great Greek scholar William Barclay), it is impossible to translate this word *praus* with just one English word. It conveys a proper balance between anger and indifference, of a powerful personality properly controlled, and of humility.

In the vocabulary of the ancient Greek language, the "**meek**" person was not passive or easily pushed around. The idea behind the word "**meek**" was strength under control, like a strong stallion that is trained to do a job instead of running wild.

The idea of being trained to do a job and serving others, however, doesn't appeal to everyone. The ancient Greeks generally thought that meekness was a fault and not a virtue.

Jesus went against the thinking of His day and said, "**Blessed are the meek.**" He knew something that society did not: there is a difference between true meekness and slave-like bondage. True meekness means freedom from hatred and vengeance. Another Greek expert described the meek as "the men who suffer wrong without bitterness or desire for revenge."

The first two beatitudes were mostly inward. This third one, however, deals with how we relate to our fellow man. The first two were mainly negative; the third is clearly positive.

To be "**meek**" is to be willing to submit to and work under proper authority. It shows a willingness to disregard one's own rights and privileges. It is one thing for us to admit our own spiritual bankruptcy, but what if someone else points it out for us? Do we react meekly? If so, we are "**blessed.**" Such a person is

- Meek before *God* in submitting to His will and conforming to His Word
- Meek before *men* in being strong yet also humble, gentle, patient, and longsuffering



Notice the reward for the meek: **“they shall inherit the earth.”** We can be **“meek,”** willing to control our desire for our rights and privileges, only when we are confident that God watches out for us and will protect our cause. God will not allow His **“meek”** ones to end up on the short end of the deal.

We might think that the **“meek”** will be devoured and run out of the world, but **“they shall inherit the earth.”** All the earth belongs to God, our Father, and thus it belongs to the **“meek”** also, because they are **“heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”** (Rom. 8:17).

In this sense we *can* have it all. We can inherit the earth, but only as God works in us so that we are poor in spirit, mourn our spiritual poverty, and become meek before God and man. You can inherit the earth.

## Chapter 6

### Hunger and Thirst Satisfied but Still There



---

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.** (Matthew 5:6)

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is perhaps the greatest single sermon ever preached. This sermon is not primarily evangelistic; rather it confronts people with the true character of the kingdom of God and what it means to live as citizens of that kingdom. Jesus likely preached these themes not only once but many times in His preaching ministry, proclaiming to disciples and potential disciples what it really means to follow Him.

Jesus had opened this sermon by pronouncing blessing upon the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek. Now Jesus marked out "**those who hunger and thirst for righteousness**" for special blessing. Those who have poverty of spirit, mourn for sin, and are meek will desire righteousness in the same way that a hungry man desires food and a thirsty man desires water.

Jesus said this in a day when people really knew what it was to be hungry and thirsty. Modern man, at least in the Western world, is often so distant from the basic needs of hunger and thirst that he finds it difficult to relate to the idea of hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

When Jesus said "**Blessed are those who hunger,**" He described a profound hunger that cannot be satisfied by a snack. This is a longing that endures and is never completely satisfied this side of eternity. It is a passion for God's order, God's way.

- This passion is *real*, like hunger and thirst are real.
- This passion is *natural*, like hunger and thirst are natural in a healthy person.
- This passion is *intense*, like hunger and thirst can be.
- This passion can be *painful*, like real hunger and thirst can cause pain.
- This passion is a *driving force*, like hunger and thirst can drive a man.
- This passion is a *sign of health*, like hunger and thirst show health.

People who hunger and thirst for righteousness have been transformed for the kingdom of God by the King. They started out aware of their sin, in poverty of spirit and mourning over sin and its effects. Then they meekly approached both God and man. Now they have a transformed nature that makes them want what God wants so deeply that it could only be described as hunger and thirst.

This is not a selfish hunger and thirst. It is a longing for God's agenda. The person who deeply desires God's righteousness isn't thirsty for the promotion of their own opinions but rather for God's truth. He or she is hungrier for the advance of God's kingdom than for personal success.

Notice the promise: “**they shall be filled.**” Jesus promised to fill these hungry ones with as much as they could eat. It is a strange filling that both satisfies a person and keeps him longing for more.

Today Christians hunger for many things—power, authority, success, comfort, happiness. But how many “**hunger and thirst for righteousness**”? We should be among those who do. If we are, we will find the blessing that Jesus promised.

## Chapter 7

### Receiving and Giving What Isn't Deserved



---

**Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.**  
(Matthew 5:7)

Every one of us needs “**mercy**” from God. Now, in His great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His disciples how they could receive this mercy.

Several times in His earthly ministry, Jesus answered the cry “Have mercy on me!” When we ask God for mercy, He gives it. But we must understand that mercy is never deserved. We are in a dangerous place when we regard God’s mercy toward us as a right; if God is obliged to show mercy, then it is not mercy.

The Bible doesn’t only speak of the mercy we need from God; it also speaks of the mercy we need to show one another. Jesus commanded mercy from man to man: “**Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.**” Since God has given us His mercy, we need to show mercy to others.

This command to show mercy speaks to people who have already received mercy. It is mercy that has brought us poverty of spirit, that has made us mourn over our spiritual condition, that has given us the grace of meekness, that has made us hunger and thirst after righteousness.

- The merciful one will show mercy to those who are weak and poor.
- The merciful one will look for those who weep and mourn.
- The merciful one will forgive others and look to restore broken relationships.
- The merciful one will be merciful toward the character of other people and think the best of them whenever possible.
- The merciful one will not expect too much from others.
- The merciful one will be compassionate toward those who are outwardly sinful.
- The merciful one will care for the souls of all men.

Don’t miss the promise in this beatitude: “**they shall obtain mercy.**” If we want mercy from others, especially from God, then we should take care to be “**merciful**” to others. Some people wonder why God showed such remarkable mercy to King David, especially after the terrible ways in which David sinned (see 2 Sam. 11). One reason is that David was notably merciful and kind to a very unworthy King Saul. David, the “**merciful,**” obtained “**mercy.**”

There is always a good argument against showing mercy to someone else: “He doesn’t deserve it!” But if the person deserved it, it wouldn’t be mercy! There is a better argument for showing mercy: since God has given us His mercy, and we want to keep receiving it, we should show mercy to others.

When we judge others, we should always judge with mercy (see Matt. 7:1–2). The ancient rabbis taught that God had two measures by which He judged people: *justice* and *mercy*. Which do you wish to be judged by?

There is a story about a woman who came to the French general and emperor Napoleon, pleading for the life of her son, who was about to be executed for desertion. Napoleon answered, “Madam, your son deserves to die!” She answered, “Yes, but I am asking for mercy, not justice.” We can receive mercy from God and give mercy to others.

## Chapter 8

### The Greatest Motivation for Purity



---

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**  
(Matthew 5:8)

In this famous beginning to the most famous sermon ever preached, Jesus charted the way to a blessed life. Up until now He had pronounced blessings upon the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and the merciful. Now, in this sixth beatitude, Jesus spoke to the “**pure in heart**,” announcing to them a great blessing: “**they shall see God.**”

In the ancient Greek, the phrase “**pure in heart**” has the idea of straightness, honesty, and clarity. Two ideas can be connected to this. One is of genuine inner moral purity as opposed to a mere image of purity or ceremonial purity. The other idea is of a single, undivided heart, speaking of those who are utterly sincere in their devotion and commitment to God.

As he often did, the great preacher of Victorian England Charles Spurgeon spoke to the heart of the idea: “Christ was dealing with men’s spirits—with their inner and spiritual nature. He did this more or less in all the Beatitudes and this one strikes the very center of the target as he says not, ‘Blessed are the pure in language, or the pure in action,’ much less, ‘Blessed are the pure in ceremonies, or in raiment, or in food,’ but ‘Blessed are the pure in heart.’”

What is the reward for the pure in heart? “**They shall see God.**” This is a most wonderful reward. The pure in heart shall enjoy greater familiarity with God than they have before. The polluting sins of covetousness, oppression, lust, and deception have a blinding effect upon a person, but the one who is “**pure in heart**” is free from these pollutions. The reward isn’t that God becomes more visible; it is that the pure in heart “**see**” better.

On this side of eternity, no human eye can see and take in the essence of God’s glory. Yet the pure of heart can, by the eye of faith, see and enjoy God in this life in a greater way than those who are not pure of heart. It is as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:12—now we see God in His glory dimly. Yet the “**pure in heart**” see Him better than others.

- The heart-pure person can see God in nature.
- The heart-pure person can see God in Scripture.
- The heart-pure person can see God in his church family.
- The heart-pure person can see something of God’s true character.

Some people can go their whole lives without seeing anything of God, totally unconscious of spiritual things and of divine reality. Yet their *not* seeing proves nothing to those who *do* see.

Ultimately, having an intimate relationship with God must become our greatest motivation for purity. Understood rightly, purity of heart is much greater than a fear of getting caught in sin or a fear of consequences. We want purity of heart because we want to see God better than ever before. To see God is great reward and great blessing.

## Chapter 9 Like Our King



---

**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**  
(Matthew 5:9)

Thus far, we have seen that when Jesus is King in our lives, we will:

- Have poverty of spirit, recognizing our need for God
- Mourn over our sinful condition and that of this lost world
- Have meek, gentle attitudes that trust God more than self
- Hunger and thirst after righteousness which is received from God and revealed in our lives
- Have mercy toward others as we remember the mercy that we have received
- Have purity of heart, leading to greater relationship with God

Now, in His seventh beatitude, Jesus announced another blessing in being a citizen of His kingdom: **“Blessed are the peacemakers.”** A peacemaker is not someone who simply lives in peace but someone who actually brings about peace by overcoming evil with good. One way to accomplish this is through spreading the good news of what Jesus did for mankind at the cross, because God has entrusted to us the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). In evangelism we make peace between people and the God whom they have rejected and offended.

This blessing for making peace comes *after* the blessing for purity. The citizen of Jesus’ kingdom first sets his or her face against all that goes against God and His purity. Then, once he has purity through faith, peace grows forth.

We think of a peacemaker as a person who stands between two fighting parties, and this is one way of making peace. But one who is part of the conflict, who has been injured or offended, can also be a peacemaker. Such a person says, “I have been hurt, but I choose to forgive and forget.” The devil stirs up trouble and hatred between men; in contrast, God loves reconciliation and longs to make peace.

Notice the reward for **“peacemakers”**: **“they shall be called sons of God.”** They are recognized as true children of God. They share God’s passion for peace and reconciliation, for the breaking down of walls between people. **“Peacemakers”** are blessed to be among the children of God, adopted into His family, counted among brothers and sisters throughout the ages.

Being a peacemaker is generally a thankless job, at least among men. Yet in Jesus’ kingdom we reconcile two parties in conflict or forgive one who has caused us offense for God’s sake, not for the applause of man.



If anyone knew the blessedness of the peacemaker, it was Jesus Himself. He set Himself between two unreconciled parties on the cross. In so doing was afflicted both by man, who beat Him, nailed Him, and mocked Him; and by God the Father Himself, who put upon Him the guilt and judgment that our sin deserved. In enduring this suffering from both sides, Jesus was blessed to make peace between man and God. King Jesus was the greatest peacemaker ever; no wonder the citizens of His kingdom who make peace “**shall be called sons of God.**”

Where does God want you to make peace today? There is a blessing in it for you.

## Chapter 10 Blessed Trouble



---

**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.** (Matthew 5:10–12)

The Beatitudes describe the citizens of Jesus' kingdom: they will be poor in spirit, mournful over their sin, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers. This describes pretty wonderful people. What should these wonderful people expect in this world? Jesus told us with the eighth and final beatitude: **“Blessed are those who are persecuted.”**

Notice that Jesus spoke of those who are persecuted **“for righteousness' sake”** and for His sake, not for their own stupidity or fanaticism (see 1 Pet. 4:15–16). Jesus was speaking of those who would live righteous lives after His example.

Jesus described persecution: **“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.”** Jesus brought insults and spoken malice into the sphere of persecution. We cannot limit our idea of persecution to physical opposition or torture.

It did not take long for these words of Jesus to ring true. Early Christians heard many enemies **“say all kinds of evil against”** them **“falsely for”** Jesus' **“sake.”** They were accused of:

- Cannibalism, because of gross misrepresentation of the Lord's Supper
- Immorality, because of gross misrepresentation of the believers' weekly love feasts and meetings
- Revolutionary fanaticism, because Christians believed that Jesus would return and that there would be an apocalyptic end to history
- Splitting families, because when one spouse or parent became a Christian, there was often division in the family
- Treason, because Christians would not honor Roman gods or participate in emperor worship

Jesus told the persecuted how to react when mistreated: **“rejoice and be exceedingly glad.”** This phrase could be translated literally as “leap for joy.” Why should we rejoice at persecution? Because we will have great **“reward in heaven.”** Also, we are in good company, for the **“prophets”** before us were also persecuted.

Puritan commentator John Trapp named men who did in fact “**rejoice**” and were “**exceedingly glad**” when persecuted:

- George Roper came to the stake at which he was burned leaping for joy and hugged it like a friend.
- Doctor Rowland Taylor leapt and danced as he came to his execution, saying, when asked how he was, “God be praised, good Master Sheriff, never better; for now I know I am almost at home . . . even at my Father’s house.”
- Lawrence Saunders, smiling, embraced the stake of his execution and kissed it, saying, “Welcome, thou cross of Christ! welcome everlasting life!”

The world persecutes these good people because its values are opposite those expressed in the Beatitudes. Our persecution may not be much compared to that of others, but if no one despises our Christianity or speaks evil of us, we need to ask ourselves if the Beatitudes are traits of our lives.

## Chapter 11

### What the World Needs Now



---

**You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.** (Matthew 5:13)

In the opening minutes of the Sermon on the Mount, in what are called the Beatitudes, or the blessings, Jesus told His disciples what the citizens of His kingdom are like and how they should live. Then, in the eighth and final beatitude, Jesus showed us that the wonderful people described in the previous seven beatitudes would often be badly received by the world. They would receive criticism, hatred, and persecution.

Our automatic response to the possibility of persecution is to protect ourselves. Kingdom citizens may reason that the best thing for them to do is to withdraw from the world and stay away from those who might hurt them.

Jesus knew this tendency, so He spoke to it immediately following His pronouncement of persecution, saying in effect, “You can’t withdraw from the world, even though people will hate and persecute you. You are like salt in the earth; the world needs you and your saltiness. Don’t lose your spiritual saltiness.” This began a new section (see Matt. 5:13–16) in Jesus’ sermon that emphasizes the Christian’s role in the world.

The citizens of Jesus’ kingdom are like “**salt**” in several ways:

- Disciples are like “**salt**” because they are *precious*. In Jesus’ day salt was a valued commodity. Roman soldiers were sometimes paid with salt, giving rise to the phrase “worth his salt.”
- Disciples are like “**salt**” because they have a preserving influence. Salt in Jesus’ day was used to preserve meats and slow decay. Christians should have a preserving influence on their culture.
- Disciples are like “**salt**” because they add flavor. Christians should be a “flavorful” people, not boring ones.

If the followers of Jesus are like salt, then they are important for the world. It’s a mistake for us to remove ourselves from a world that needs us so badly. The salt needs to get out of the saltshaker and into the world.

Yet Jesus warned, “**If the salt loses its flavor, . . . it is then good for nothing.**” Salt must keep its saltiness to be of any value. When it is no good, it is “**trampled underfoot.**” In the ancient world salt wasn’t very well processed or refined, and when its salty character had diminished, people often threw it outside on a path. Salt that isn’t salty anymore just gets walked over.

A chemist will tell you that it is chemically impossible for salt to lose its saltiness, and that is true of the pure substance. But the impurities found in what passed for salt in the ancient world made this word picture of Jesus completely understandable. It leaves us a good thought: When does salt lose its saltiness? When it has more impurities than salt in its substance.

The world needs what the followers of Jesus have to give.

## Chapter 12

### Shining Out So All Can See



---

**You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**  
(Matthew 5:14–16)

Jesus gave Christians a great compliment: “**You are the light of the world.**” But it was also a great responsibility, because Jesus Himself claimed to be “the light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5). Being “**the light of the world**” means not only receiving Christ’s light but also giving it.

Jesus never challenged us to *become* salt (see Matt. 5:13) or light. He simply said that we *are* these things—and we are either fulfilling or failing our given responsibility.

As salt and light, we are to be *distinct* from the world. Salt is needed because the world is rotting and decaying, but if our Christianity is likewise rotting and decaying, it won’t be any good. Light is needed because the world is in darkness, but if our Christianity imitates the darkness, we have nothing to show the world. To be effective, we must be distinctly Christian. We can never affect the world for Jesus by becoming like the world.

Therefore, Jesus said, “**Let your light so shine before men.**” The purpose of light is to illuminate and expose what is around it. If a light source is hidden “**under a basket,**” it is not useful. A life marked by the Beatitudes is not to be spent in isolation but rather lived out before the world.

Jesus also said we should be like “**a city that is set on a hill**” that “**cannot be hidden.**” Such a city is prominent; when seen from a distance, it is hard not to look at it. In the same way, Jesus wants the people of His kingdom to live lives which attract attention to the beauty of God’s work in them.

Jesus continued, “**Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand.**” We are to be *intentional* about letting this light shine. Even as lamps are placed up high so that their light can be more effective, so we should look for ways to let our light shine in greater and broader ways.

Putting the three pictures together from this second section of Jesus’ sermon, we see what the effect of Jesus’ disciples in this world should be:

- Salt is the opposite of corruption, and it prevents corruption from getting worse.

- Light gives the gift of guidance so that those who have lost their way can find the path home.
- A city is the product of social order and government; it is against chaos and disorder.

Jesus pointed His disciples to a breadth of impact that must have seemed almost ridiculous to them at the time. How could these humble Galileans salt the earth or light the world? But they did. So can we.

## Chapter 13

### Fulfilling the Law—for Us and in Us



---

**Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.**

(Matthew 5:17–18)

Jesus began a new section in His sermon (see Matt. 5:17–48) by trying to prevent a misunderstanding: **“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets.”** Jesus here began a long discussion of the law, making clear that He did not oppose the Old Testament. He had **“not come to destroy”** the Word of God but to free it from the way the Pharisees and scribes had wrongly interpreted it.

Jesus made it clear: **“I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”** Jesus had authority apart from the law of Moses but not against it. He added nothing to the law except one thing that no man ever had: perfect obedience. Even though Jesus often challenged man’s interpretations of the law (especially Sabbath regulations), He never broke the law. This is one way Jesus **“fulfilled”** the law.

The phrase **“the Law or the Prophets”** included the law of Moses but went beyond that to represent all the Hebrew Scriptures:

- Jesus **“fulfilled”** the *doctrinal teachings* of the **“Law”** and the **“Prophets”** by bringing full revelation.
- Jesus **“fulfilled”** the *predictive prophecies* of the **“Law”** and the **“Prophets”** in that He was the Promised One and showed the reality behind the shadows.
- Jesus **“fulfilled”** the *moral and legal demands* of the **“Law”** and the **“Prophets”** by fully obeying them and reinterpreting them according to truth.
- Jesus **“fulfilled”** the *penalty* of the **“Law”** and the **“Prophets”** for us by dying on the cross, taking the penalty we deserved.

Therefore, Jesus could emphasize the lasting importance of the law: **“One jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”** The **“jot”** and **“tittle”** were Hebrew punctuation marks. Jesus was saying, “Not one dot of an *i* or cross of a *t* will pass away until all is fulfilled.” Indeed, Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law. The apostle Paul confirmed, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4).



This is especially appropriate in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon presents a higher standard than any of us can reach. If our salvation depended on our obedience to this standard, we would be doomed. Yet knowing that Jesus “is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” relieves us of the need to earn our salvation by fulfilling the law and gives us, by faith, the gift that Jesus earned for us.

Having received Jesus' righteousness, we can live as citizens of Christ's kingdom as described in the Sermon on the Mount. Our obedience is still necessary but only as a response to righteousness received, not as a requirement to receive righteousness.

Thank Jesus for fulfilling the law for us—and by faith receive His gift.

## Chapter 14

### A Different Kind of Righteousness



---

**Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.**

(Matthew 5:19–20)

When Jesus warned that “**whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments**” would “**be called least in the kingdom of heaven,**” He meant that the Old Testament commandments were to be obeyed as seen in His life and teaching, not in the legalistic sense of the religious authorities of His day. For example, the law commanded sacrifice, but Jesus fulfilled that, so we do not need to observe it.

Jesus made clear that the law remains important: “**Whoever does and teaches [the commandments], he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**” While the Christian is done with the law as a means of gaining a righteous standing before God (see Gal. 2:21), the law still stands as the perfect expression of God’s ethical principles and of what He requires of man.

It’s like this: The law sends us to Jesus to be justified, because it shows us our inability to please God ourselves. But after we come to Jesus, He sends us back to the law to learn the heart of God regarding our conduct and sanctification.

Jesus then said one of the most striking things in His entire sermon: “**Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.**” The “**Pharisees**” were so scrupulous in their keeping of the law that they tithed even the spices from their herb gardens (see Matt. 23:23).

This kind of devotion is shown by some modern-day Orthodox Jews. In early 1992, tenants allowed three apartments in an Orthodox Israeli neighborhood to burn to the ground while they asked a rabbi whether a telephone call to the fire department on the Sabbath violated Jewish law. (Observant Jews are forbidden to use the phone on the Sabbath.) In the half hour it took the rabbi to decide, the fire spread to two neighboring apartments.

Considering to what degree the scribes and Pharisees kept the law, it might seem that we could *never* exceed their “**righteousness.**” Yet we *can*, because our righteousness should go beyond theirs in *kind*, not *degree*.

Paul described these two kinds of righteousness in Philippians 3:9: his “own righteousness, which is from the law” versus “that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”

The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was impressive to everyone—except God. The Lord saw the hypocrisy, pride, and self-focus that corrupted the religious leaders’ good deeds.

We are not made righteous by keeping the law but by receiving Jesus’ righteousness by faith. As Jesus goes on to tell us what keeping the law *really* means, we will be thankful that He offers us His righteousness.

## Chapter 15

### Getting to the Root of the Matter



---

**You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.” But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, “Raca!” shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire.**

(Matthew 5:21–22)

Jesus now began to teach on the true meaning of the law. This wasn't Jesus against Moses; it was Jesus against false interpretations of Moses. The scribes and Pharisees both restricted God's commands (as in the law of murder) and extended God's commands (as in the law of divorce).

Jesus began to set it straight when He said, “**You have heard it said . . .**” Jesus' listeners had not studied the law of Moses themselves. All they had was the teaching about the law from the religious leaders.

When Jesus said “**it was said to those of old . . .**,” He was stating that just because something is old doesn't mean that it's true. Puritan commentator John Trapp expressed this: “Antiquity disjointed from verity is but filthy hoariness; and deserveth no more reverence than an old lecher, which is so much the more odious, because old.”

In contrast to what the people had merely heard, Jesus proclaimed, “**But I say to you . . .**” Jesus showed His authority, not relying on the words of scribes or teachers.

Now we learn from teacher Jesus: “**Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.**” The teaching of the scribes and Pharisees (“**You shall not murder**”) was true enough. Yet they also taught that anything *short* of murder might be allowed. Jesus corrected this: not only those who commit the *act* of murder are in danger of judgment but also those who have murderous intent.

To the scribes, the law was a matter of *outward performance*, never the heart. G. Campbell Morgan said of this, “The supervision of the Kingdom does not begin by arresting a criminal with blood-red hands; it arrests the man in whom the murder spirit is just born.”

Jesus continued, “**Whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council.**” “**Raca**” expressed contempt for a person's intelligence and “**fool**” for a person's character. Both broke the *heart* of the law against murder.

Now Jesus did *not* say that anger is as bad as murder. Someone who shouts at a person in anger has *not* sinned as badly as someone who murders a person in anger. The law condemns *both*, not that they are the *same*. While the laws of the people dealt only with the outward act of murder, God's morality addresses not only the end of murder but also its beginning.

God is concerned with both the fruit and the root. When we truly understand the law, we see that we must be transformed at the core, not only on the outside.

## Chapter 16

### Taking Care of First Things First



---

**Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.**

(Matthew 5:23–26)

One of the great themes in the Sermon on the Mount is exposing the contrast between true and false religion, not so much in a theological sense but in how we live out our ideas about God.

Here Jesus spoke of someone doing good in a religious sense—bringing a gift to the altar of sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem. Yet Jesus also said that if on the way a person remembered that something was wrong in a relationship with a brother or sister in the faith, he or she should stop.

Jesus continued, **“Leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way [and] be reconciled to your brother.”** It is far more important to be reconciled to a brother in the faith than to perform a religious duty. Our service for the Lord does not justify bad relationships with others. We should do what Paul commanded in Romans 12:18: “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”

Instead of going on in our intended service to God, we should **“agree with”** our **“adversary quickly.”** Jesus commanded us to promptly settle any anger or malice that others may have against us. When we ignore this, Jesus said, it is like we are **“thrown into prison.”**

Paul expressed the same teaching in Ephesians 4:26–27: “Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.” When we hold onto anger against each other, we “give place to the devil.”

Jesus strongly warned those who thought that they could ignore relationships in the name of serving God. Not only would they suffer bondage (**“prison”**), but they would stay there until things were set right: **“Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.”** These are sobering words from Jesus. A chronic neglect of relationships shows that something is fundamentally wrong with a person’s relationship with God.

It has become common for Christians to joke, “I love God; I just can’t get along with people.” But Jesus pressed upon us an urgency to get it right with people. When we don’t get along with our brothers and sisters in the faith, it reflects something disturbing in our relationship with God. Since Jesus so clearly gave us this priority, only a fool would ignore it. Take care of first things first—get your relationships right before bringing your service or sacrifice to God.

## Chapter 17

### The Sin and the Heart Behind the Sin



---

**You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

(Matthew 5:27–28)

Jesus had said several times, “**You have heard that it was said,**” contrasting what the people had *heard* about the law of God with what God had actually said and meant. Now Jesus dealt with what the people had heard regarding the law of adultery. Of course, the teachers of the day taught that adultery was wrong. But they applied the law only to the act of adultery, not to the heart that motivated it.

Therefore, Jesus said, “**Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**” It is possible to commit adultery in our hearts, or minds. This is sin and prohibited by the command against adultery.

With the words “**whoever looks at a woman,**” Jesus named the origin of lust as the eyes (see Job 31:1). Our eyes can cause much damage to our souls because of what we allow ourselves to look upon. John Trapp observed, “When one seemed to pity a one-eyed man, he told him he had lost one of his enemies, a very thief, that would have stolen away his heart.”

In speaking to the source of sexual immorality, Jesus went deeper than the act itself. Some people avoid adultery because they are afraid of getting caught, but in their hearts they commit adultery every day.

Jesus was *not* saying that the act of adultery and adultery in the heart are the same thing. Some people have been deceived on this point, saying, “I’ve already committed adultery in my heart, so I may as well do it in practice.” The act of adultery is *far worse* than adultery in the heart. Jesus was teaching that both are prohibited by the command against adultery.

This principle applies to much more than men looking at women. It applies to anything that we can covet with the eye or the mind.

What we think about and allow our hearts to rest on is based on *choice*. Many believe that they have no choice, and therefore no responsibility, for what they think about. We may not be able to control passing thoughts or feelings, but we can certainly decide where our hearts and minds will rest.



This shows the important distinction between temptation and sin. Jesus, though tempted in all ways, never yielded to sin (see Heb. 4:15). As a man, Jesus would have been tempted to see women as objects, yet in pure love He looked upon every woman as a daughter, sister, or mother. We too need to see others not as mere objects but as they really are before God.

Thank God that our hope is in Jesus—the only One to really live out the Sermon on the Mount. Our prayer is, “Jesus, live in me, save me, and move me to do Your will—both in my actions and my heart.”

## Chapter 18

### Strangely, Not Far Enough



---

**If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.**

(Matthew 5:29–30)

I will never forget what I heard a wonderful Bible teacher say about Jesus' words on plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand: "I wish Jesus had never said this." That might sound irreverent, but as he explained, I understood him completely: he had once dealt with a person who had terribly disfigured himself based on a misunderstanding of this passage.

When Jesus said, "**If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out,**" He used a figure of speech. Sadly, some have taken this statement literally and mutilated themselves in mistaken efforts in the pursuit of holiness. For example, a famous early Christian named Origen castrated himself on the principle of this passage.

The trouble with a literal interpretation of this passage is that it does not go far enough. Even if we did cut off one of our hands or gouge out one of our eyes, we could still sin with our other hand or eye. And if all those were gone, we could especially sin with our minds.

As with most Bible passages, it is best to keep reading in order to get the accurate sense of its meaning: "**for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.**" Jesus was simply stressing the point that we must be willing to sacrifice to be obedient. If parts of our lives are given over to sin, then we must realize that it is more profitable for those parts our lives to "die" rather than to condemn our whole lives.

Many are unwilling to do this, and that is why they remain trapped in sin or never come to Jesus. They never get beyond a vague wish to be better. With this dramatic figure of speech, Jesus reminded us that vague wishes aren't enough.

Most of us have read dramatic stories of people who have been trapped with a limb pinned under a heavy rock or tree. Faced with the choice between losing their limb and losing their lives, these people gain the courage to make the terrible decision to do the necessary thing—to trade their limbs for their lives.

Jesus told us to have the same mentality of willingness to sacrifice for the sake of obeying and following Him. Doing something so great can only happen as He works His will in us. That is our prayer: "Jesus, work in me the willingness to sacrifice in the struggle against sin."

## Chapter 19 Not for Just Any Reason



---

**Furthermore it has been said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.” But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.**  
(Matthew 5:31–32)

In this lengthy section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly contrasted the truth of God’s law and wrong interpretations of that law. He had correctly interpreted the Old Testament laws against murder and adultery; now He would rightly interpret the law regarding divorce.

Jesus began, **“It has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’”** In Jesus’ day, many people interpreted the law that gave permission for divorce (see Deut. 24:1) as granting divorce for virtually any reason.

The law of Moses did insist that a proper certificate of divorce be written if a man were to divorce his wife. Making this a legal process created time for passions to cool, and if the separation indeed were to happen, then it would have legal formality. The requirement to **“give her a certificate of divorce”** was meant to make divorce less common, not more common.

Yet in Jesus’ time, the permission of Deuteronomy 24:1 had become an instrument of cruelty against wives. The scribes and religious teachers made a certificate of divorce as easy and quick to get as possible. The religious leaders did nothing to fulfill the intent of the law; acting in the name of the law, they worked against its purpose.

In that time the permissible grounds for divorce were debated. Views revolved around either a strict or loose interpretation of the word “uncleanness” in Deuteronomy 24:1. Rabbi Shammai said that Deuteronomy 24:1 gave permission for divorce only if there was adultery. Rabbi Hillel said that if a husband had any complaint against his wife at all—even if she merely burned his breakfast or he saw a woman who pleased him more than his wife—he could rightly divorce her. As you might imagine, the thinking of Rabbi Hillel was most popular (at least with the men).

Jesus made it plain that “uncleanness” in Deuteronomy 24:1 is **“sexual immorality.”** The teaching of Jesus on marriage and divorce is further explained in Matthew 19, but here Jesus was simply getting back to the intent of the law instead of allowing it to be used as easy permission for divorce.

Jesus' teaching on this topic went against the thinking of many. Jesus said that marriage is intended for permanence and should always be fought for. He also said that divorce should be avoided and is permitted only in certain circumstances. If we listen to Jesus, we too will go against much of the thinking of our present culture.

It is easy for us to twist the teaching of the Bible into something we wish it were instead of what it actually says. We must, to the best of our ability, let the Bible speak for itself. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus showed us how.

## Chapter 20

### Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say



---

**Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.” But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No.” For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. (Matthew 5:33–37)**

Many Jews in Jesus’ day loved and valued the law of God, yet their respect for God’s law was often based more on tradition than correct understanding. Jesus now addressed this with the law against swearing oaths: **“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely.’”**

One of the Ten Commandments clearly says, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” (Exod. 20:7). Yet by Jesus’ day, the religious leaders had twisted this law to allow using virtually every name but the Lord’s to make false oaths.

People swore by heaven, the earth, Jerusalem, or their own heads. They also swore by the temple, the gold in the temple, the altar, and the offering on the altar (see Matt. 23:16–22). This kept the letter of the law but not its intent.

To correct this, Jesus said, **“Do not swear at all.”** Even if you swear by **“heaven,” “earth,” “Jerusalem,”** or even **“your head,”** you still swear by God—and your oath must be honored.

Instead of swearing an oath to establish that we are telling the truth, we should simply let our **“Yes” be “Yes.”** Having to make oaths demonstrates that we do not have enough strength of character to confirm what we say.

Some have taken this teaching of Jesus to be an absolute prohibition of all oaths. This is misguided, because oaths are permitted under certain circumstances, as long as they are not abused or used to cover deception:

- The apostle Paul made oaths (see Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20; 1 Thess. 2:5).
- Jesus spoke under oath in a court (see Matt. 26:63–64).
- God in heaven Himself swears oaths (see Luke 1:73; Heb. 6:13).

William Barclay had good insight on this: “The truly good man will never need to take an oath; the truth of his sayings and the reality of his promises need no such guarantee. But the fact that oaths are still sometimes necessary is the proof that men are not good men and that this is not a good world.”

Do people believe our word? Is our yes received as yes and our no as no? Of course, sometimes a person is entirely truthful yet not believed— Jesus is the prime example of this. Yet nothing in what we say or do should give others valid reason to doubt us. We should say what we mean and mean what we say.

## Chapter 21 Lavishing Love on All



---

**You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.**  
(Matthew 5:38–42)

Jesus now addressed an often-abused law: “**You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’**” This command was intended to *limit* retribution by civil government, but the Pharisees had made it an *obligation* in personal relationships.

“**An eye for an eye**” extends to accepting certain evils against oneself. When a person insults us, we want to give back the same, plus more. But we should not “**resist an evil person.**” Instead, we should trust God to defend us.

Jesus did not mean that evil should never be resisted. After all, He turned over tables in the temple. Jesus was speaking here of interpersonal relationships. When Jesus Himself was personally insulted (called a glutton, drunkard, illegitimate child, blasphemer, or madman), He did not resist.

Jesus did not mean that a physical attack cannot be defended against. A slap “**on your right cheek**” meant a deep insult, not a physical attack (see 2 Cor. 11:20). If someone hits us over the head with a baseball bat, we should not allow him to hit the other side.

Jesus did not mean that there is no place for punishment in society. We must turn our cheeks when personally insulted, but the government has a responsibility to restrain people from physically assaulting others (see Rom. 13:1–4).

This teaching applies to attacks on our pocketbooks: “**If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.**” Under the law of Moses, a person’s outer cloak could not be taken (see Exod. 22:26; Deut. 24:13). Yet we should gladly let go of what we might legally keep.

Jesus extended this to demands on our work: “**Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.**” We are to take command of evil impositions by deliberately giving more than required. At that time a Roman soldier could command a Jew to carry his pack for one mile. Jesus said, “Go beyond the one mile, and give another out of love.”



Jesus drove this home: **“Give to him who asks you.”** The only limit to this is that which love itself imposes: It isn't loving to give into manipulation without transforming it into a free act of love. It isn't loving to give people what they ask for if giving it would do them more harm than good.

The heart of a true disciple of Jesus lavishes love on all. As Romans 12:21 says, such a person isn't overcome by evil but overcomes evil with good.

## Chapter 22 Your Love Life



---

**You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?**

(Matthew 5:43–47)

Jesus had been dealing with people’s misunderstanding of the law of Moses. Now He dealt with the law about loving our neighbors: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”** The Mosaic law commanded, “You shall love your neighbor” (Lev. 19:18). Yet some teachers in Jesus’ day had added an opposite and evil misapplication—an obligation to **“hate your enemy.”**

Jesus gave the true intention of the law: **“But I say to you, love your enemies.”** In God’s view, *all people* are our neighbors, even our enemies. To truly fulfill this law, we must **“love,” “bless,” “do good to,”** and **“pray for”** our enemies—not only our friends.

Jesus was utterly realistic. He said that we are to respond to our enemies in love, trusting that God will protect our cause and “destroy” our enemies in the best way possible—by transforming them into friends.

When we do this, we show that we are **“sons of”** our **“Father in heaven.”** We imitate God, who loves *His* enemies by sending **“rain on the just and on the unjust.”**

All this is challenging enough, but Jesus made it even stronger: **“If you love those who love you, what reward have you?”** It is no virtue to merely return the love that others give us. Lots of people do that.

Remember, Jesus was teaching us about the character of the citizens of His kingdom. There are many reasons *why* more should be expected from Christians than from those in the world:

- Christians *claim to have* something that others do not—renewal, repentance, and redemption in Jesus Christ.
- Christians *do in fact have* something that others do not—renewal, repentance, and redemption in Jesus Christ.

- Christians have a power that others do not have—they can do all things through Christ who strengthens them.
- Christians have the Spirit of God dwelling within them.
- Christians have a better future than others do.

How is your love life? Do you have enemies—people who work against you and against whom you perhaps work as well? Choose to love them. Pray for them, and look for ways to bless them. That is the kind of love life Jesus lived and wants to live out through His people. Look to Him, and let Him do it through you.

## Chapter 23

### How to Be Perfect



---

**Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.**  
(Matthew 5:48)

Jesus had been challenging His disciples to understand the law of Moses properly (see Matt. 5:17–48), dealing with our tendency to redefine the law in ways that make it easier to keep. Now, at the end of this section, Jesus said, “**Therefore you shall be perfect.**” Simply put, if a man lived the way Jesus told us to, he would truly be “**perfect**”:

- He would never hate, slander, or speak evil of another person.
- He would never lust in his heart or covet anything.
- He would never make a false oath and would be completely truthful.
- He would let God defend his personal rights and not take it upon himself to defend those rights.
- He would always love his neighbors, even his enemies.

A person who did all this would be “**perfect, just as**” our “**Father in heaven is perfect.**” Such a person would truly have a righteousness greater than the scribes and Pharisees (see Matt. 5:20), the very thing we must have to enter into God’s kingdom.

Yet only one Man has ever lived like this—Jesus Christ Himself. Are the rest of us left out of the kingdom of God?

This pointed statement of Jesus at the end of this section of the Sermon on the Mount shows us that Jesus was not primarily teaching God’s requirements for daily living. True, Jesus revealed God’s ultimate standard, and we must take it to heart, but His primary intent was to say, “If you want to be righteous by the law, you must keep the whole law, internal and external—that is, you must be ‘**perfect.**’”

We need a righteousness apart from the law. As the apostle Paul put it in Romans 3:21–22, “The righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.”

This helps us see our proper relation to the law: we are guilty sinners who can never make ourselves righteous by good works. Instead, we must look to Jesus—the only One ever to keep the law in perfection. As we put our trust in Him, His keeping of the law is credited unto us. We fulfill the law in its perfection through faith in Him.

To understand the interpretation and demands of the law, we do well to remember another aspect of Jesus' teaching: when we focus on the command to love God and our neighbor, we rightly understand the demands and details of the law (see Matt. 22:37–40). This doesn't make the law easier to perfectly perform, but it does make it easier to understand.

When we understand the law, we honor it as the expression of God's beautiful standard for mankind—and then we look to Jesus, our “**perfect**” keeper of the law. Only through Him can we keep the law, as it is credited to us by faith and as He lives in and through us.

## Chapter 24

### Doing Good for the Right Motives



---

**Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.**  
(Matthew 6:1)

As Jesus continued His famous sermon, He came to a new topic. The broad subject of His sermon is to describe the character and lifestyle of the citizens of the kingdom of God. It is as if Jesus was saying, “I came as a King, but not the kind of king you expected. Let Me tell you how My reign impacts the lives of those who follow Me; let Me describe the character of My kingdom.”

In the previous section of this sermon, Jesus had addressed this broad subject by explaining the true interpretation of the law of God. Many people in His day had gotten into the habit of re-explaining the law in a way that made it easier to obey, but they had essentially stripped the law of its God-intended meaning, so Jesus was showing them the understanding of the law that really honored God. Now, after having shown a true understanding of God’s righteous standard, perhaps Jesus anticipated a thought in the mind of a listener: *Wouldn’t everybody be impressed if I was like that?* So Jesus began a new section that addressed the danger of cultivating a mere image of righteousness (see Matt. 6:1–18).

It is almost impossible for us to do spiritual things in front of others without thinking about their opinions of us. Therefore, Jesus said, “**Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men.**” The word translated “**charitable deeds**” actually means “righteousness.” Jesus told us not to do righteous things for the sake of display or image (“**to be seen by them**”).

This does not contradict Jesus’ previous command to “let [our] light so shine before men” (Matt. 5:16). Although followers of Jesus are to be seen doing good works, they must not do good works *simply* to be seen.

Why is this important? Jesus explained: “**Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.**” When we do righteous deeds for the attention and applause of men, that attention and applause is our reward. It is much better to receive a “**reward from**” our “**Father in heaven.**”

Some people say, “All that is important is the *doing* of the deed. *How* I do it is much less important than the doing of it.” Yes, in some cases it would be better to do the right thing in the wrong way or from the wrong motive than to do the wrong thing. But Jesus’ point is clear: God cares about how we do our good works and with what motives we do them.

Jesus thus began to deal with three spiritual disciplines: giving, prayer, and fasting. As we examine these, we shouldn't forget the fundamental principle that God cares about how we do our good works and with what motives we do them.

## Chapter 25

### The Right Way and the Wrong Way to Give



---

**Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.**  
(Matthew 6:2–4)

In this section of His sermon (see Matt. 6:1–18), Jesus described with what heart we should perform spiritual deeds. He first described how we should give charity: **“When you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet.”**

Some people in Jesus’ day drew attention to their giving so that they would be known as generous. Perhaps Jesus had in mind the gifts given during feast times, which were signaled by the blast of a trumpet. Regardless, the idea of doing **“a charitable deed”**—giving alms and charity—was deeply established in the Jewish mind. To give charity was to gain credit in the eyes of God, atone for past sins, and gain forgiveness.

Today people do not **“sound a trumpet”** to announce their generosity, but they know how to call attention to their giving. When giving is done this way, it is **“as the hypocrites do.”** The ancient Greek word translated **“hypocrites”** is the same word for **“actor.”** Such spiritual performers act as pious, holy people when they are not. Having a standard does not make someone a hypocrite; rather, claiming to live by that standard but failing to do so does. This is called having a double standard.

Jesus described the reward of such spiritual performers: **“Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”** Those who give to hear the applause of others should enjoy that applause, because it is all the reward that they will receive.

Instead, our giving should be, if it were possible, hidden even from ourselves: **“Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”** Though we cannot really be ignorant about our own giving, we can deny ourselves any indulgent self-congratulation. We should never give to receive the praise of others, that our **“charitable deed may be in secret.”**

If someone finds out that we have given something, do we lose our reward? It’s a matter of motive: If we give for our own glory, it doesn’t matter if no one finds out; we will still have no reward from God. If we give for God’s glory, it doesn’t matter who finds out; our reward will remain, because we gave for the right reason.



There is great value in doing good deeds for the glory of God: **“Your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”** It is much better to receive our return from God, who rewards more generously and **“openly”** than men do.

Giving done the right way will certainly be rewarded. We can be sure of that, even when it doesn't feel like it.

## Chapter 26

### The Right Way and the Wrong Way to Pray (Part 1)



---

**And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.** (Matthew 6:5–6)

Jesus assumed that His disciples would give, so He had told them the right way to give (see Matt. 6:1–4). He also assumed that His disciples would “**pray.**” Therefore He said, “**When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites.**”

Jesus did not say, “If you decide to pray . . .” Instead, Jesus knew that the people of God would indeed talk to their God. In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, He told us to avoid praying “**like the hypocrites**” pray.

How do the hypocrites pray? “**Standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets.**” There were two main places where a Jew in Jesus’ day might pray in a hypocritical manner: at the synagogue at the time of public prayer and on the street at the appointed times of prayer (nine in the morning, noon, and three in the afternoon).

In the synagogue services, often someone from the congregation was asked to offer a public prayer. The hypocrites loved to pray before an audience.

Street corners were not normally places of public prayer. Yet it wouldn’t have been hard for someone to intentionally time the events of his day so that he just “happened” to be in a public place when the call to prayer sounded at nine, noon, or three.

The hypocrite’s motive was simple: “**that they may be seen by men.**” This is a common fault in public prayer today, when people pray to impress or teach others instead of genuinely pouring out their hearts before God.

This kind of prayer is an insult to God. When we mouth words toward God while really trying to impress others, we use God merely as a tool to impress people.

Jesus explained the futility of this kind of prayer: “**They have their reward.**” Those praying to be seen of men should enjoy their reward in full—because that is all they will receive. There is no reward in heaven for such prayers.

Jesus then described the right way to pray: **“But you, when you pray, go into your room.”** Instead of praying to be seen by men, we should meet with God in our **“room”** (or “closet”). The idea is of a private place where we can impress no one except God. Significantly, the ancient Greek word translated **“room”** was used to describe a storeroom where treasures were kept. There are treasures waiting for us in our prayer closets.

Jesus did not prohibit public prayer, but He made it clear that our prayers should be directed toward God and not man. In such prayer we find treasure.

## Chapter 27

### The Right Way and the Wrong Way to Pray (Part 2)



---

**And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.**

(Matthew 6:7–8)

Jesus continued teaching His disciples the right way to pray. He had already rebuked those who prayed to be seen of men rather than heard by God. Now Jesus exposed a wrong-headed technique of prayer that some people use: thoughtless repetition.

Jesus said, **“When you pray, do not use vain repetitions.”** **“Vain repetitions”** are prayers made up of many words and little meaning. They are all on the lips and not from the mind or heart.

Religious custom in Jesus’ day promoted praying long prayers for the sake of praying long prayers. According to William Barclay, an ancient rabbi said, “Whoever is long in prayer is heard.” Another said, “Whenever the righteous make their prayer long, their prayer is heard.” One famous Jewish prayer began like this: “Blessed, praised and glorified, exalted and honored, magnified and lauded be the name of the Holy One.” Jesus warned against such prayers.

People who worship false gods often make long prayers. In 1 Kings 18:26 the prophets of Baal cried out, “O Baal, hear us!” for half the day. In Acts 19:34 a mob in Ephesus shouted, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” for two hours. The true God isn’t impressed by the length or eloquence of our prayers but the heart.

When we try to impress God (or worse, other people) with our many words in prayer, we deny that God is a loving yet holy Father who delights to hear our prayers. Instead, we should follow the counsel of Ecclesiastes 5:2: “God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few.”

Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, reminded us, “Christians’ prayers are measured by weight, and not by length. Many of the most prevailing prayers have been as short as they were strong.”

The New International Version translates the ancient Greek word for **“vain repetitions,”** *battalogeō*, as “keep on babbling.” That may be an accurate sense of the word, which actually sounds like “babbling” and has the sense of “blah, blah, blah.” Sad to say, some Christians pray with a lot of “blah, blah, blah.”

Instead, Jesus told us, “**Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.**” We don’t pray to tell God things that He doesn’t know. We pray to remind ourselves of our great need, to prompt and express our faith, to raise our souls from earth to heaven, and to commune with and appeal to a loving God who wants us to bring every need and worry before His throne.

Jesus will go on to tell us the right way to pray. Yet before we can embrace the good, we must put away the bad. Having put aside trying to impress God with lengthy prayers or using empty repetition, we are ready to learn the right way to pray.

## Chapter 28

### The Model Prayer (Part 1)



---

**In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

(Matthew 6:9–10)

In this section of His great sermon—perhaps the greatest sermon ever preached—Jesus taught His followers how to give, pray, and fast in the right ways. Jesus had first corrected false ideas about prayer. Now He gave His disciples a model prayer: **“In this manner, therefore, pray.”**

The model begins with the right way to address God: **“our Father in heaven.”** The right kind of prayer recognizes to whom we pray, using a privileged title that demonstrates a privileged relationship. It was unusual for Jews of that day to call God **“Father,”** because it was considered too intimate. One commentator even says that there is no evidence of anyone before Jesus using this term to address God. When it came to prayer, Jesus was a true revolutionary. God is the mighty sovereign of the universe who created, governs, and will judge all things—but, happily, He is also **“our Father.”**

What kind of Father is He? He is our **“Father in heaven.”** When we say **“in heaven”** we remember God’s holiness and glory.

This prayer is also focused on community. Jesus said **“our Father,”** not **“my Father.”** G. Campbell Morgan rightly observed that **“the whole prayer is social.”** This prayer contains no reference to **“I”** or **“me”** or **“my.”** We come to the Father as individuals, but each of us prays as a member of a great family.

After the opening address, the model prayer continues: **“Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** The right kind of prayer has a passion for God’s glory and agenda. We naturally want to guard our own names and reputations, but we must resist this tendency to protect and promote ourselves and instead put God’s **“name,”** **“kingdom,”** and **“will”** first.

Jesus wanted us to pray that the **“will”** of God **“be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** In heaven there is no disobedience or obstacle to God’s will. Citizens of Jesus’ kingdom want to see God’s will done as freely **“on earth as it is in heaven.”**

A man can pray **“Your will be done”** with fatalism and resentment: **“You will do Your will. I don’t like it, but there is nothing I can do about it.”** Or he can say it in perfect love and trust: **“Do Your will, because it is best. Change me where I don’t understand or accept Your will.”**

One might wonder why God wants us to pray that His will be done, as if He were not able to accomplish it Himself. God is more than able to do His will without our cooperation. Yet He invites the participation of our prayers, our hearts, and our actions in seeing His **“will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”**

## Chapter 29

### The Model Prayer (Part 2)



---

**Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

(Matthew 6:11–13)

Jesus continued to describe a model prayer: **“Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”** The right kind of prayer freely brings its needs to God. This includes needs for daily provision, forgiveness, and strength in the face of temptation.

When Jesus spoke of **“bread,”** He meant real bread, as in what we need for food every day. Early theologians allegorized this, because they couldn’t imagine that Jesus spoke about an everyday thing like bread in such a majestic prayer as this. They thought that bread referred to communion, the Lord’s Supper, or to Jesus Himself as the bread of life or to the Word of God. Yet all these miss the point: God *does* care about everyday needs, and we should pray about them.

Then Jesus told us to ask for forgiveness: **“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”** The one who is truly forgiven will show forgiveness to others; Jesus would elaborate more on this later in His sermon. Note that Jesus used the idea of **“debts”** to describe our sin. Before our sin is forgiven, we owe something to God; since in Jesus Christ our debt of sin is paid, we who have been forgiven should forgive.

We must also pray for strength in the face of temptation: **“Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”** The word **“temptation”** literally means a “test”; it is not always an invitation to do evil. God has promised to keep us from any testing that is greater than what we can handle (see 1 Cor. 10:13). In prayer we should always remember our own weakness and vulnerability, and pray for constant protection in the midst of every testing.

If we truly pray **“Do not lead us into temptation,”** we will never:

- Boast in our own strength
- Long to be tested by trials
- Walk into temptation
- Lead others into temptation



This model prayer ends with these words: **“Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.”** The right kind of prayer praises God and credits to Him **“the kingdom and the power and the glory.”**

Such a statement of praise to God is often called a “doxology.” There is some dispute as to whether this doxology was in Matthew’s original manuscript or was added later by a scribe. Even if it was added, the thought is nevertheless wonderful. True prayer recognizes that everything belongs to God— **“the kingdom and the power and the glory.”**

This model prayer invites us to do something: pray. Knowing all about prayer matters little if we don’t actually pray. So pray—and do it remembering the model Jesus gave us.

## Chapter 30

### The Need to Forgive



---

**For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.** (Matthew 6:14–15)

In His great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us a model prayer. It is often called “the Lord’s prayer,” but perhaps it would be more accurate to call it “the disciples’ prayer.” In that prayer Jesus gave the memorable line “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). With that line Jesus linked the way His disciples forgive and the way they are forgiven. The assumption is plain: those who ask God for forgiveness must also forgive those who have wronged them.

Now Jesus built on this idea. First, He put it in the positive: **“If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”** Then He put it in the negative: **“If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”**

If this was the only thing Jesus and the New Testament said about forgiveness, we might assume that we can earn forgiveness from God if we forgive others. But Jesus tells us much more about forgiveness (see Matt. 9:2–6; 18:21–35; Luke 17:3–4), making it clear that we don’t earn it. The apostle Paul also plainly stated that the basis of forgiveness is what Jesus did for us on the cross, not anything we do (see Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14).

Taking such passages into account, we can see Jesus’ point in this context: forgiving others is required by those who have been forgiven. We don’t have the luxury of holding onto bitterness toward other people.

When we begin to see how greatly we have sinned against God and how great His forgiveness is toward us, then we can properly see that what others have done against us is small by comparison. It is all a matter of perspective. The earth is big, but compared to the sun, it is small (the sun is 33,200 times bigger than the earth). Even so, the wrongs done against us may be big in our lives, but compared to the wrongs done to God, they are small. If we have an exaggerated view of the wrongs done against us, it proves that we have too small a view of our own wrongs before God.

Forgiving others is often hard—among the most difficult things we do. We can do it only if we really appreciate how greatly God has forgiven us. Yet we must do it. Jesus emphasized the imperative of forgiveness—it is not an option for us, because it is the right thing to do, being the only proper response of someone who has been forgiven and wants to receive more forgiveness from God.

Another reason that forgiving others isn't an option is that it sets us free. You can live in the freedom of forgiveness today. First receive God's forgiveness, and then give it to others.

## Chapter 31

### Fasting and Fattening



---

**Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.**

(Matthew 6:16–18)

Jesus had spoken about giving and praying; now He closed this section on spiritual disciplines by addressing fasting. In saying “**when you fast,**” Jesus clearly assumed that His followers would fast.

The practice of fasting—abstaining from all food, allowing only water—was familiar to the Jewish people of Bible times. The Old Testament commanded fasting on the Day of Atonement (see Lev. 16:29–31; 23:37–32; Num. 29:7). During the exile the Jewish people expanded the practice of fasting (see Zech. 7:3–5; 8:19).

The Pharisees typically fasted twice a week (see Luke 18:11–12). As with giving and praying, however, they had corrupted this practice. A modern example of a good thing gone bad is the matter of dressing nicely on Sundays. While dressing up can be an expression of reverence, if it is used to compete with others or draw attention to oneself, something good has become something bad.

To guard against this, Jesus said, “**When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites.**” The scribes and Pharisees wanted everybody to know that they were fasting, so they made sure to show a “**sad countenance**” and “**disfigure their faces**” so that their agony would be evident to all.

Jesus described the penalty of corrupted fasting: “**Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.**” When hypocrites receive the admiration of men for their “spiritual” efforts, they receive all the reward they will get. Sadly, this is fine with many hypocrites, because the real problem with hypocrites is self-interest. They like to impress others so that *they themselves* can be pleased by how wonderful people think they are.

Jesus went on, “**When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting.**” In contrast to the hypocrites, we should act as usual and make our fasting something of a secret before God.

What would Jesus say to Christians in the West today about fasting? He might not be concerned with *how* we fast; instead, He might say, “I can’t speak to you even as hypocritical fasters, because you don’t fast at all. This is an important spiritual discipline, and you should practice it.”

Based on photographs, Charles Spurgeon doesn’t appear to have fasted often, at least not in his later years. Yet even he observed, “Fasting took a leading place in devotion under the Law, and it might profitably be more practiced even now under the Gospel. The Puritans called it ‘soul-fattening fasting,’ and so many have found it.”

Perhaps if we fasted more, our souls would be fatter and healthier.

## Chapter 32

### The Choice Between Two Treasures



---

**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

(Matthew 6:19–21)

Jesus now began a new section in His sermon (see Matt. 6:19–34) that focuses on material things in the life of a disciple: “**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.**” Earthly treasures are not bad in and of themselves, but they are of no ultimate value. Thus, it is wrong for disciples of Jesus to dedicate their lives to continually expanding their earthly treasures.

To “**lay up for yourselves treasure on earth**” is to doom yourself to a life of frustration and emptiness. The secret to happiness is not in having *more* things but in having *contentment*. Several people were once asked how much money they would have to make to have the lives they really wanted; most thought they would have to double their income. But the apostle Paul had the right idea: “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6).

It is not wrong to have earthly treasures, but it is wrong to lay up treasures for *self*. We must live as stewards, or managers, of our possessions as belonging to God and not to us.

Then Jesus set it in the positive: “**Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.**” Heavenly treasures, in contrast to “**treasures on earth,**” are everlasting and incorruptible. “**Treasures in heaven**” do give enjoyment now, in the contentment they bring us, but their ultimate enjoyment comes in eternity.

It has been wisely observed that a hearse is never followed by a moving truck full of possessions. The pharaohs of Egypt were buried with gold and treasures to take into the afterlife, but they left them all behind.

Jesus told a parable about a dishonest manager who was about to be called to account (see Luke 16:1–14). Knowing that he would be fired, the manager began to settle accounts with his master’s debtors at terms favorable to the debtors so that they would treat him kindly later. The master complimented the manager for his shrewd tactics. This dishonest manager was praiseworthy for two reasons: first, he took seriously the fact that he would be called to account; second, he took advantage of his present position to arrange a comfortable future. We too can use our material resources right now for eternal good.

Our material treasures will not pass from this life to the next, but the good that we have done for the kingdom of God through the use of our treasures, as well as the work that God has done *in us* through faithful giving, will last for eternity.

Jesus said, **“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** Handled wrongly, earthly treasures can keep us from heaven. Handled rightly, earthly treasures can be used to store up heavenly treasures. How is your heavenly bank account?

## Chapter 33

### The Choice Between Two Visions



---

**The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!**

(Matthew 6:22–23)

As Jesus talked about material possessions in this section of His sermon, He emphasized the idea that His followers must make a choice—between two treasures, two visions, and two masters. To follow Jesus means that we must choose not to follow anything or anyone contrary to Him.

Jesus used the illustration of light and the human eye, saying, “**The lamp of the body is the eye.**” Light comes into the body through the eye. If our eyes were blind, we would live in a dark world.

This leads to a logical conclusion: “**If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.**” There are two possible ideas behind having a “**good**” eye: being either generous or single minded. Some think that Jesus deliberately chose wording that had both meanings, because both principles apply to a disciple’s attitude toward material things.

Being generous brings light to our lives. We are happier and more content when we have God’s heart of generosity. If we are not generous, however, it is as if the “**whole body will be full of darkness.**” Selfish, miserly ways cast darkness over everything a person thinks or does.

Being single minded brings light to our lives. We are happier and more content when we focus on the kingdom of God and His righteousness, knowing that all our needs will be added to us (see Matt. 6:33). When we are double minded, on the other hand, it is as if the “**whole body**” is “**full of darkness.**” Trying to live for two masters at the same time puts a dark shadow over everything in our lives.

This choice between two visions has consequences—either we will be “**full of light**” or “**full of darkness.**” Our eyes are directed at either heavenly things (and therefore “**full of light**”) or earthly things (and therefore “**full of darkness**”).

Then come sobering words: “**How great is that darkness!**” If we are blind in our eyes, our whole bodies are blind. The darkness is then great throughout our bodies. In the same way, our attitudes toward material treasure will bring either great light or great darkness to our lives.



Materialistic, greedy, tight-fisted Christians often justify their sin by saying, “It’s just one area of my life.” But just as the darkness of the eye affects everything in the body, so a wrong attitude toward material things brings darkness to a person’s whole being.

The words of Jesus call us to a choice between a vision full of light or living under darkness. A choice that seems rather small turns out to be very large—as big as the difference between light and darkness. The cost of choosing selfishness and double mindedness is more than we can afford. Choose generosity and single mindedness instead.

## Chapter 34

### The Choice Between Two Masters



---

**No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.**  
(Matthew 6:24)

Jesus was emphasizing the idea that His followers must choose between two treasures, two visions, and two masters. To follow Jesus means that we must decide not to follow anything or anyone that is contrary to Him.

Jesus said it plainly: “**No one can serve two masters.**” Having “**two masters**” is not like working two jobs. Jesus had the master-slave relationship in mind, and no slave can serve two masters. It is simply an impossibility.

If we think that we are successfully serving two masters, we are deceived. Ancient Israel *thought* that they could worship both the Lord God and Baal. But God constantly reminded them that to worship Baal was to forsake the Lord God. To be “**loyal to the one**” is to “**despise the other.**”

This is true in many areas of life, but Jesus brought the point especially to the subject of money when He said, “**You cannot serve God and mammon.**” Bible experts have different opinions regarding the origin of the word “**mammon.**” Some think it was the name of a pagan god. Others think it comes from the Hebrew word that means “to trust,” because we are often tempted to trust in material things. Regardless, the meaning is clear: “**mammon**” is materialism, or wealth personified.

According to commentator R. T. France, the idea of “**mammon**” itself was morally neutral. Some ancient Jewish texts show this, translating Proverbs 3:9 as “Honor God with your mammon” and Deuteronomy 6:5 as “You shall love the LORD your God with . . . all your mammon.” Therefore “**mammon**” could represent material things that can either be used for God’s glory or become destructive idols in our lives.

Certainly, Jesus was talking about the heart. Many people say that they love God, but their use of money shows that in fact they do not. How can we tell which master we are serving? One way is by considering what we are willing to sacrifice for. We will sacrifice for our God. If a person will sacrifice for the sake of money but not for Jesus, “**mammon**” is his God.

I once read about a Los Angeles businessman who had been wounded by a gunshot. As he was dying, he called out the names of his children, but he still clutched his \$10,000 Rolex watch in his hand—the watch he had refused to give the thief and had paid for with his life. “**Mammon**” received his life as a sacrifice that sad day.

This also applies to people who cannot afford a \$10,000 wristwatch. We don't have to be rich to serve "**mammon**." It is entirely possible for the poor to be just as greedy and covetous as the rich can be.

Don't serve your money. Let your money serve the Lord, and it will serve you, even increasing your reward in heaven. "**Mammon**" is a good servant but a terrible master.

## Chapter 35

### Your Life Is More



---

**Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?**

(Matthew 6:25)

Jesus had just challenged His listeners to decide between two treasures, two visions, and two masters. He made clear that it is better to choose a heavenly treasure, a focused vision, and God as master. Through all this, Jesus made us think about the superiority of God's kingdom over material wealth.

Now Jesus brought an important application of these truths: because the kingdom of God is so greatly superior to earthly pursuits, it deserves our attention. If we allow them, the everyday cares of our lives will crowd out the focus we should have upon God and His kingdom.

Thus, Jesus said, **“Do not worry about your life.”** We should not get tangled up worrying about the things of this world, because our lives are more than those things. While we can be unfaithful to God through coveting mammon, as Jesus previously described, we can also be unfaithful to God through worry and excessive concern about the things of this world.

Notice how powerfully Jesus expressed this, including **“what you will eat or what you will drink”** and **“what you will put on.”** Those three concerns describe what many people in this world live for. Commentator Adam Clarke said it well: “The belly and back of a worldling are his compound god; and these he worships in the lust of the flesh, in the lust of the eye, and in the pride of life.” I wonder if Adam Clarke would have added in our day, “. . . and what he does to entertain himself.”

It's important to notice what Jesus told us to avoid. He said, **“Do not worry.”** There is a difference between a godly sense of responsibility and an ungodly, untrusting worry. The problem is that an ungodly, untrusting sense of worry usually masquerades as responsibility.

Notice the example of Jesus. We have no evidence that He was ever worried about what He would eat or drink or wear. Jesus concerned Himself with doing His Father's will, and the Father concerned Himself with taking care of Jesus.

Now Jesus did not tell us to never be concerned. We *are* to be concerned with the right things, the ultimate issues of life. But we must leave the management (and the worry) of material things with our heavenly Father.

Jesus powerfully emphasized His point when He wrote, “**Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?**” The worry Jesus spoke of reduces human life to the concerns of what we put in our bellies and wear on our backs. It debases man to the level of an animal who is concerned merely with physical needs.

Your life is “**more,**” and you have eternal matters to pursue. This day, find a way to make your Father’s business your business.

## Chapter 36

### Why Not to Worry



---

**Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?**

(Matthew 6:26–30)

Most people know that it is bad to worry. But advice like “Just think positively” or “Think happy thoughts” or “Don’t worry, be happy” doesn’t have much substance. When Jesus told us not to worry, He gave us solid reasons as to why we shouldn’t worry.

He began by saying, “**Look at the birds of the air; . . . your heavenly Father feeds them.**” God provides for the birds, and He takes pretty good care of them. We should expect that God will also take care of us.

We should note, however, that while the birds don’t *worry*, they do *work*. Birds don’t just sit with open mouths, expecting God to fill them. They go out and work for the food that God has provided for them.

Jesus drew a comparison between the birds and us: “**Are you not of more value than they?**” The worry many people have over the material things of life is rooted in a low understanding of their “**value**” before God. They don’t comprehend how much He loves and cares for them.

Jesus gave another logical reason as to why we should not worry: “**Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?**” Worry accomplishes nothing; it can “**add**” nothing to our lives. There might be bigger sins than worry, but there is none more self-defeating and useless. Indeed, instead of worry *adding* to our life, it can cause us harm. Stress is one of the greatest contributors to disease and poor health.

Jesus made a third argument against worry: “**If God so clothes the grass of the field . . .**” God takes care of even the “**grass of the field,**” so He will certainly take care of us.

Jesus closed this brief rebuke of worry with sobering words: “**you of little faith.**” “**Little faith**” is not a little problem. It is a big problem, because it treats God as if He was someone who cannot be trusted. It is a big problem because it harms us with stress and fear.

I like what Charles Spurgeon said about this kind of little faith: “To think the Lord who clothes the lilies will leave his own children naked is shameful. O little faith, learn better manners!” With these good manners before our good God, we will worry less and trust Him more.

## Chapter 37

### What to Look for First



---

**Therefore do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.**

(Matthew 6:31–34)

Jesus now finished addressing material things with a simple statement: “**Therefore do not worry.**” He was inviting us to freedom from worry over material things.

Commentator Matthew Henry knew this freedom. After being robbed of everything he had, he wrote,

Lord, I thank You:  
That I have never been robbed before.  
That although they took my money, they spared my life.  
That although they took everything, it wasn't very much.  
That it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.

Jesus explained why we should not anxiously ask, “**What shall we eat?**” or “**What shall we drink?**” or “**What shall we wear?**” It is because “**after all these things the Gentiles seek.**” Those who know God and receive His loving care should “**seek**” after different things than those who do not know God and are separated from Him.

Therefore, those who know God should “**seek first the kingdom of God.**” This is not just another priority that we put at the top of our list of priorities. Rather, in *everything* we do we are to “**seek first the kingdom of God**”—loving our spouses, honoring our employers, being good citizens.

Remember, Jesus made this statement in the context of material things. We are to devote our lives not to our physical well-being but to His kingdom. If we seek mammon, our lives will be cursed with worry.

Jesus didn't just tell us to stop worrying; He also told us to *replace* worry with a concern for the kingdom of God. We can only give up a habit or a passion for a greater habit or passion.



For those who do this, there is a precious promise: “**All these things shall be added to you.**” This includes heavenly treasure, divine provision, and fellowship with God in His kingdom.

Jesus concluded this section with common sense: “**Do not worry about tomorrow.**” If we *must* worry, we must worry only for the things of today. Most of our worry is about things over which we have absolutely no control and is therefore foolish as well as harmful.

Wisely, Jesus told us that “**sufficient for the day is its own trouble.**” We need to live for the present “**day.**” It isn't wrong to remember the past or plan for the future, yet it is easy while doing this to ignore “**the day**” and “**its own trouble.**”

We need to come back to the fundamental choice that we all make when we first repent and are converted: “**seek first the kingdom of God.**” Every day after that, our Christian lives either reinforce that decision or deny it. Which will you do today?

## Chapter 38

### Well Known Yet Often Misunderstood



---

**Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.**

(Matthew 7:1–2)

“**Judge not, that you be not judged**” may be the best-known words of the Bible, particularly among those who seem to know nothing of the Bible. Most people who quote this verse seem to think (or hope) that Jesus was commanding a universal acceptance of any lifestyle or teaching. The plain meaning of Jesus’ words and their context show that this is *not* what He meant here.

At this point in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus moved to a new idea. Until now He had dealt with themes connected with the interior spiritual life; now He began to speak of how we think and act toward others (see Matt. 7:1–6).

Later in this sermon Jesus would command His disciples to know themselves and others by the fruit of their lives (see Matt. 7:15–20), and some sort of assessment is necessary for that. The Christian is called to show unconditional love, not unconditional *approval*.

But we must also remember that when we pass judgment on others, we will be “**judged**” in a similar manner. While this does not prohibit examining others’ lives, it certainly prohibits doing so unjustly. When a woman anointed Jesus’ feet with oil (see Matt. 26:6–13), the disciples rashly judged her. But Jesus said that she had done a good work that would always be remembered.

- We break this command when we think the worst of others.
- We break this command when we speak to others only of their faults.
- We break this command when we judge an entire life only by its worst moments.
- We break this command when we judge the hidden motives of others.
- We break this command when we judge others without considering ourselves in their circumstances.
- We break this command when we judge others without being mindful that we ourselves will be judged.

Don’t miss what Jesus said: “**With what judgment you judge, you will be judged.**” Jesus did not *prohibit* the judgment of others. He required only that our judgment be completely fair and that we judge others by a standard with which we would also like to be judged.

When our judgment of others is wrong, it is often not because of the standard we use but because we hypocritically ignore that standard in our own lives. It is common to judge others by one standard and ourselves by another—being far more generous with ourselves than with others.

The principle upon which Jesus built the command “**judge not, that you be not judged**” is “**with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.**” This is a powerful motivation for us to extend love, forgiveness, and goodness toward others.

According to the teaching of some rabbis in Jesus' time, God had two measures that He used to judge people: justice and mercy. Whatever “**measure**” you want God to use with you, you should use that same “**measure**” with others.

## Chapter 39

### Illustrating the Principle with Humor



---

**And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me remove the speck from your eye"; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.**  
(Matthew 7:3–5)

Jesus had warned His listeners against judging each other, especially by a standard they did not apply to themselves. Now He gave an illustration regarding the danger of judging others.

Jesus asked, **"Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?"** Jesus used the **"speck"** and the **"plank"** humorously to show how we are generally far more tolerant of our own sin than we are of others'.

Obviously, no one would have a literal **"plank,"** or board, in his or her eye. Jesus used this exaggerated picture to make His message memorable and easy to understand. Some people think of Jesus as a man without humor, but the illustration Jesus used here seems more like something out of a *Three Stooges* film than a systematic theology.

Still, the spirit of judging which Jesus exposed was real. One example of this spirit was when the religious leaders brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus. She had certainly sinned, but their sin was much worse than hers was, and Jesus exposed it as such: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7).

Notice what Jesus said to those who harshly judge others: **"Look, a plank is in your own eye."** The one with a **"plank in"** his **"own eye"** is not immediately aware of it. He is blind to his obvious fault. Yet such a person who fusses about small sins in others earns the accusation of **"Hypocrite!"**

Our hypocrisy in these matters is almost always more evident to others than to ourselves. We may ignore the plank in our own eye, but others notice it immediately. We see this in David's reaction to Nathan's story about a man who had unjustly stolen and killed another man's lamb. David quickly condemned the man but was blind to his own sin, which was much greater (see 2 Sam. 12:1–15).

What did Jesus say to do? **"First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."** It is not wrong for us to help our brother with the speck in his eye. In fact, it is good—*but not before* we deal with the plank in our own eye.

In his *Poor Richard's Almanac*, Benjamin Franklin put the same idea into different words: "Clean your finger, before you point at my spots." Sometimes we need to speak to others about their problems—but first we need to deal with our own. To do otherwise is evidence of hypocrisy.

## Chapter 40

### Combining Love with Discernment



---

**Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.**

(Matthew 7:6)

In this section in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 7:1–6), Jesus had warned His disciples against judgmental attitudes and criticizing others while remaining blind to their own faults. To close this section, Jesus said, “**Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine.**”

The context makes sense. After warning against harshly condemning others, Jesus made clear that the people of His kingdom were not to suspend all discernment. We must recognize that good and precious things should not be given to those who will receive them with contempt. Jesus seemed to say, “Don’t be judgmental, but don’t throw out all discernment either.”

The “**dogs**” and “**swine**” here are often understood as those who are hostile to the kingdom of God and the message that announces it. Our love for others must not blind us to their hardened rejection of the good news of the kingdom.

We may also see this command in the context of Jesus’ previous words against hypocrites. Perhaps Jesus referred to the “**dogs**” and “**swine**” as hypocritical, judgmental believers. These sinning hypocrites should not be offered the “**pearls**” that belong to the community of the saints.

Commentator William Barclay said that the ancient Christian writing known as the *Didache* said, “Let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those baptized into the name of the Lord; for as regards this, the Lord has said, ‘Give not that which is holy unto dogs.’”

Jesus also spoke in the context of correcting a brother or sister. Godly correction is a pearl (though it may sting for a moment) that must not be cast before “**swine**” (those who are determined not to receive it).

This is true also in the more familiar sense. Our “**pearls**” of the precious gospel may only confuse those who do not believe—who are blinded to the truth by “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4)—and may only expose the gospel to their ridicule. Yes, Jesus told us to take the gospel all over the world (see Mark 16:15). Yet the apostle Paul and his associates, when they saw that certain people were “hardened and did not believe” and “spoke evil of the Way before the multitude,” no longer preached to them (Acts 19:9). Paul refused to cast “**pearls**” before those who rejected them.

Of course, Jesus did not say this to discourage us from sharing the gospel. Previously in this very sermon, Jesus had told us to let our light shine before the world (see Matt. 5:13–16). Jesus said this about casting “**pearls**” before “**swine**” in order to call us to discernment and encourage us to look for prepared hearts in people who are ready to receive. When we find such open hearts, we can trust that God has already been working on them.

## Chapter 41

### Asking, Seeking, Knocking



---

**Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.**

(Matthew 7:7–8)

The broad theme of the Sermon on the Mount focuses on living as citizens of the kingdom of God. Within this theme Jesus dealt with many topics. At this point in His sermon, He came back to the idea of prayer (see Matt. 6:5–15; 7:7–11), because it is such an important part of life in His kingdom.

Jesus described prayer in three pictures: “**Ask**,” “**seek**,” and “**knock**.” In these we see a progressive concentration—intensity, passion, and persistence. In this threefold description, we see different aspects of prayer and its rewards:

- Prayer is *asking*. We make our requests known to God, and “**everyone who asks receives.**”
- Prayer is *seeking*. We search after God, His Word, and His will, and “**he who seeks finds.**”
- Prayer is *knocking*. We seek entrance into the heavenly palace of our great King until the door is “**opened**” to us—the best reward of all.

The idea of knocking implies that we may sense resistance as we pray. After all, if the door were already open, we would not need to knock. Jesus encouraged us, “When the door is closed, knock and continue to knock, and you will be answered.”

The image of knocking also implies that there is a door that *can* be opened. The door to God and answered prayer is intended as an entrance. It is of no use to knock at a wall, but Jesus told us to “**knock**” in prayer as if we were at a door ready to be opened.

When we come to God’s door, all we must do is “**knock**.” If the door were locked against us, we would need a burglar’s tools to break in, but that isn’t necessary. And any of us can “**knock**”! Charles Spurgeon said, “Any uneducated man can knock if that is all which is required of him. . . . A man can knock though he may be no philosopher. A dumb man can knock. A blind man can knock. . . . It must be as plain as knocking at a door.”

Jesus said, “**Ask, and it will be given to you.**” God promises an answer to those who diligently seek Him. Many of our passionless prayers are not answered for good reason—it is as if we are asking God to care about something that we care little or nothing about.



God values persistence and passion in prayer because they show that we care about the things He cares about. Persistent prayer does not overcome God's stubborn reluctance; it gives glory to Him, expresses dependence upon Him, and aligns our hearts more with His heart.

So **“ask,” “seek,”** and **“knock”**—and keep doing it. God will meet you in your need and answer according to His love, power, and wisdom. He has promised to do so.

## Chapter 42

### How Much More?



---

**Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!**

(Matthew 7:9–11)

Jesus had encouraged the simple act of persistent prayer, telling us to keep asking, seeking, and knocking. Now Jesus corrected a wrong idea about prayer which many people have—that it is our job to convince a reluctant, stubborn God that He should give us things He really doesn't want to give us, but if we nag Him enough, He may do what we want.

Jesus corrected this, saying, **“What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?”** God doesn't have to be persuaded or appeased in prayer. He is a loving God who is ready to give to His children. Just as a man would never give a stone to a son who asked for a piece of bread, so God will give us the good things we ask for.

Of course, we don't always know what the good things are. Sometimes we ask for something that would be like a stone or a serpent to us, and God knows better than to give us what we mistakenly request. Jesus' main point here is that God is a loving, giving God and should be approached as such in prayer.

He made His point clearly: **“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven!”** It is a sinful misunderstanding of the nature of God to deny that He answers the seeking heart. Doing so would imply that God is worse than an evil man.

Instead, compared to even the best human father, **“how much more”** good and loving is God the Father to His children? **“How much more”** good is God than even the best human father? Jesus didn't say “a hundred times more” or “a thousand times more.” He left it to our meditation, because it is beyond calculation.

When we realize how loving and how good God really is, it prompts us to prayer. Many years ago, the author J. B. Phillips wrote a book with a powerful title: *Your God Is Too Small*. His intent was to show that the idea of God in many people's minds is actually much smaller than God really is. We can say the same thing regarding the love of God to many people: “Your God isn't loving enough.” The true God is more loving than we often dare to expect.

Today, think about how much God loves you—and let that lead you to real prayer. He knows how to **“give good things to those who ask Him.”**

## Chapter 43

### Gold for the Golden Rule

---

**Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.**

(Matthew 7:12)

Jesus began the final section of His great sermon (see Matt. 7:12–29) with one of the most memorable lines in the Bible, often called the “golden rule”: “**Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.**”

This command had long been stated in a negative way: “You should *not* do to your neighbor what you would *not* want him to do to you.” It was a significant advance for Jesus to put it in the positive and say that we should *do unto others* what we want them to do unto us.

Ten or so years before the public ministry of Jesus began, a Gentile seeker came to the famous Jewish rabbi Hillel. The Gentile asked the rabbi to summarize the entire law of God in so short a time that the man could stand on one leg for the whole description. It is said that Rabbi Hillel responded, “What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. This is the whole law; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.”

When Jesus expressed this familiar law in a positive sense, He broadened it. It is like the difference between *not* breaking traffic laws and *doing* something positive, like helping a man whose car has broken down.

Later in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus would describe the judgment of the sheep and the goats (see Matt. 25:31–46). The unfortunate goats were guilty because they *had not done what they should have done*. Under the negative form of the rule, the goats would have been found not guilty. Under Jesus’ positive form, they were indeed guilty.

How different the world would be if people followed the golden rule! No one would steal, cheat, lie, or murder. There would be more kindness and companionship. The person who wanted a friend or needed comfort would reach out to someone else who needed the same. Multiply this principle throughout a community, a nation, the world—and it would almost be heaven on earth.

This simple principle summarizes all that “**the Law and the Prophets**” say about how we should treat others. If we would simply follow it, we would naturally obey all that the law says about relationships with others.

Jesus’ explanation makes the law easier to understand, but it *doesn’t make it easier to obey*. No one has ever consistently done unto others as he would like others to do unto him. Where do we begin with the golden rule? By asking God to forgive us for not keeping it—and by realizing that our failure to keep something so simple means that we need a Savior, Jesus Himself.

This brief, powerful word from Jesus points us in the right direction—and exposes our need for Jesus as our Savior and strength. It's a golden rule, but we are bankrupt. Let Jesus be your gold (see Rev. 3:18), and He will help you live out His golden rule.

## Chapter 44

### The Decision Between Two Ways, Two Destinations



---

**Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.**

(Matthew 7:13–14)

Jesus' words about the narrow and wide gates continue this great conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, which some consider the greatest sermon ever preached. Having explained to the people what the life of a citizen of His kingdom was like, with these words Jesus was bringing His hearers to a place of decision. Jesus had explained what life in His kingdom is like and how thoroughly His disciples fall short of God's standard. Now, as part of His call to a decision, Jesus said, "**Enter by the narrow gate.**"

Jesus did not speak of the narrow gate as our destiny but as the entrance to a path. There is a right path and a wrong path, and Jesus appealed to His listeners to decide to go the more difficult way, "**which leads to life.**"

In this Jesus understood and taught that not all ways and destinations are equally good. The broad way leads to "**destruction,**" the difficult way to "**life.**"

Jesus was careful to give us the truth about these ways. He wasn't like a slick salesman who tells people only what they want to hear and neglects the cost involved. Instead, Jesus boldly said, "**Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life.**" The true gate is both "**narrow**" and "**difficult.**"

Look at the words used to describe the path leading to destruction:

- It has a "**wide**" "**gate.**"
- It is a "**broad**" road ("**way**").
- "**Many**" travel this way.

Look at the words used to describe the path leading to life:

- It has a "**narrow gate.**"
- It is a "**difficult**" road ("**way**").
- "**Few**" "**find**" this way.

Jesus stated the sad truth that “**there are many who go in by**” the “**gate**” that is “**wide.**” It is no surprise that many people take the easier way—the path of least resistance. It is human nature to choose a wide gate instead of a narrow one. It is human nature to want a broad, easy road instead of a difficult path. It is human nature to go the way of the many instead of the way of the few.

It is only when we make ourselves think of the *destination* that the harder choice makes sense. “**Life**” is better than “**destruction.**” So, despite the difficulties on the way, *choose life*. If your gate is wide and your road easy and well-traveled, it is smart to reexamine your path—and think about where you are going. If your road seems difficult right now, take heart and think of your destination: it is “**life,**” not “**destruction.**”

## Chapter 45

### Good Fruit, Bad Fruit, No Fruit



---

**Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.**

(Matthew 7:15–20)

Jesus had just warned His disciples of a broad path that leads to destruction. Now with the words “**beware of false prophets,**” He reminded them that many would try to guide them along this path. The first step to combating these “**false prophets**” is simply to “**beware of**” them, because:

- Not all who claim to speak for God are true.
- The difference between truth and falsehood is important.
- False prophets never tell us that they are false.
- Many false prophets are convinced that they are true prophets.
- The price of following a false prophet is very high.

One of the great dangers of false prophets is that they “**come to**” us “**in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.**” It is in the nature of “**false prophets**” to deny their true character. They often deceive even themselves, believing themselves to be sheep when in fact they are “**ravenous wolves.**”

Wolves are not interested in helping sheep—they are interested only in what they can get from the sheep. The fundamental problem of the false prophet is *self-interest*. This self-interest can be expressed in a desire for gain, an easy life, prestige, or even advancing one's own ideas and not God's.

Jesus gave us one way to know a false prophet: “**By their fruits you will know them.**” We guard ourselves against “**false prophets**” by taking heed to their “**fruits.**” This means paying attention to:

- A teacher's *manner of living*. Does he show righteousness, humility, and faithfulness?
- The *content* of a teacher's teaching. Is it true fruit from God's Word, or is it man-centered, appealing to ears that want to be tickled or amused?
- The *effect* of a teacher's teaching. Are people growing in Jesus or merely being entertained and eventually falling away?



Jesus clarified, “**Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.**” “**Fruit**” is the inevitable result of who we *are*. Eventually the good or bad fruit will be evident, revealing what sort of “tree” we are.

Note that the choices are not only to bear good fruit or bad fruit. There is a third category, also bad: “**every tree that does not bear good fruit.**” Both the one who bears *bad* fruit and the one who bears *no* fruit are judged.

Earlier Jesus had warned us to look for the beam in our own eyes before turning our attention to the speck in our neighbor’s eye. Before asking anyone else, we should first ask ourselves, “Do I bear fruit unto God’s glory?” Jesus brings us to the place of decision.

## Chapter 46

### The Decision Between Two Claims



---

**Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”**

(Matthew 7:21–23)

As Jesus continued the conclusion of His sermon, He called His listeners to another decision: **“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven.”** Jesus spoke here of calling Him **“Lord”** but not living under His lordship. Calling Jesus **“Lord”** is absolutely important, but it is never enough by itself.

This warning applies to people who say things to Jesus or about Jesus but don’t really mean them. It isn’t that they believe that Jesus is a devil; they simply speak of Him superficially. Their mind is elsewhere; they speak bare words with no heart, soul, or spirit.

Many people say **“Lord, Lord,”** yet their spiritual lives have nothing to do with their daily lives. They go to church and may fulfill some daily religious duties, yet they sin against God and man just as any other person might.

Jesus brought it back to Himself: **“who says to Me . . . will say to Me in that day . . .”** It is staggering that Jesus freely claimed that *He* is the One before whom people must stand on the final day of judgment and the One who is rightly called **“Lord.”** This sometimes-obscure teacher in a backwater part of the world claimed to be the judge of all men **“in that day”**—the coming day of judgment.

Jesus anticipated that some would protest on that day, saying, **“Lord, Lord, have we not . . . ?”** These people had impressive spiritual accomplishments: they had **“prophesied,” “cast out demons,”** and **“done many wonders.”** These are wonderful things, but they mean nothing without true fellowship with Jesus. Significantly, these people did these things *in the name of Jesus*, yet they never really had a relationship of trust, love, and fellowship with Jesus.

Jesus did not seem to doubt their claims of doing the miraculous. This shows us that sometimes miracles are granted through pretend believers, reminding us that in the final analysis, miracles *prove* nothing.

It is sad to think that some on that day will hear the words, “**I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!**” In the end, there is one basis for salvation. It isn't mere words, even the right words; it is not spiritual works, even miraculous ones. It is knowing Jesus and being known by Him. Our connection to Him, by the gift of faith that He gives us, secures our rescue. Connected to Jesus, we are secure; disconnected from Him, miracles and great works prove nothing.

Each of us must make the claim “**Lord, Lord,**” but will it be empty or filled with meaning? Destiny depends on your answer.

## Chapter 47

### The Decision Between Two Builders, Two Destinies



---

**Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”**

(Matthew 7:24–27)

With this great picture of two houses and their foundations, Jesus closed the Sermon on the Mount. He used it to call His listeners to an important decision between two destinies.

Jesus described both the person who hears and does what He says and the person who doesn't: “**a wise man who built his house on the rock**” and “**a foolish man who built his house on the sand.**” Both builders worked hard and finished their jobs. Both houses looked the same from the outside. The difference between their houses, however, was in the *foundation*.

In good weather, there seemed to be no difference between the two foundations. But then the weather changed for the worse: “**The rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the house.**” Jesus warned that the foundations of our lives would be shaken at some time or another, both now (in troubles) and in the ultimate judgment before God.

Time and the storms of life will prove the strength of one's foundation. The wise man's house held fast in the storm; the foolish man's house was destroyed.

We may be surprised when we see who has truly built upon the good foundation. It is important that we test the foundation of our lives *now* rather than later, when we stand in judgment before God, and it is too late to change our destinies.

The people who build on a bad foundation are “**everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them.**” Merely *hearing* God's Word isn't enough to provide a secure foundation. We must also be *doers* of the Word. If we are not, our sin will surely find us out (see Num. 32:23), and “**great**” will be our “**fall.**”

The second builder did not deliberately *want* to build on a bad foundation; he simply didn't think it was very important. Jesus warned us to *pay attention* to our foundation.

None of us will ever completely keep the words of Jesus. Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount drive us back again and again as needy sinners upon our Savior. This gives all the more reason why we need to hear His words and do what He tells us to do—focused on trusting who He is and what He has done for us. That is a secure foundation.

## Chapter 48

### The Effect of Jesus' Message



---

**And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.**  
(Matthew 7:28–29)

In the Sermon on the Mount, this majestic message from the Lord, Jesus had dealt with many themes:

- The character of the citizens of His kingdom
- The responsibility of the citizens of His kingdom to live as lights in the world
- The way the citizens of His kingdom should understand the law of God
- The manner and heart in which the citizens of His kingdom should do spiritual works
- The manner and heart in which the citizens of His kingdom should regard money and material things
- The way the citizens of His kingdom should treat one another
- The way the citizens of His kingdom should pray and trust God
- The vital choice that each must make regarding God's kingdom and their citizenship in it

In all this Jesus had given His listeners an understanding of who He was and what kind of kingdom He was bringing to this earth. Many people in the days of Jesus were confused by wrong expectations about the kingdom. One great purpose of the Sermon on the Mount was to correct those misunderstandings and for Jesus to say, "I come to you as a King, and this is what My kingdom is like; this is how it is experienced in the life of the citizens of this kingdom."

In the last verses of Matthew 7, we learn what the reaction of the people was: "**the people were astonished at His teaching.**" They were amazed. What they had heard from Jesus was not like anything they had heard before.

What did they think was different about the teaching of Jesus? "**He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.**" Jesus' audience could not help but notice that Jesus taught with an authority which the other teachers of His day lacked. In those times it was common for a teacher to simply quote other rabbis when they discussed the Scriptures: "Rabbi so-and-so says this"; "Scribe this-and-that says something else."

Jesus was different. He taught with an authority all His own as He spoke God's revealed Word. The scribes and rabbis of that day spoke *by* authority, but Jesus spoke "**as one having authority.**"

That was not the only thing that impressed the people who heard Jesus: “**The people were astonished at His teaching.**” They were mostly surprised by the *way* Jesus taught (“**as one having authority**”), but they were also “**astonished at His teaching**” itself. What Jesus had taught them about the kingdom of the Messiah was very different from what they had previously thought about it. Jesus had corrected their wrong ideas.

When we truly understand Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount, we should be “**astonished**” also. If we are not, then we probably haven’t really heard or understood what Jesus said. Let Jesus tell you what He is like and what His kingdom is like, instead of assuming that you already know. Let Him astonish you.



David Guzik is a **pastor**, Bible teacher, and author of the Enduring Word Bible commentary, which is used by millions worldwide.

He has been in Christian service for more than 35 years, including two church plants and more than seven years as a missionary in Germany, as director and teacher for an international school (Calvary Chapel Bible College Germany).

David earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1991. Through the years of David's pastoral ministry and writing of the Bible commentary, he had no formal Bible College or seminary training, but earned a Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree from Calvary Chapel University in 2021.

David is married to Inga-Lill for more than 39 years and together they have three adult children and two grandchildren.

For more resources by David Guzik please visit  
[enduringword.com](http://enduringword.com)