

# SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Sermon & Life Group  
Booklet  
August-September  
2019



**Name:**

## About Life Groups @ St Matt's

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At St Matt's we understand that healthy, God-honouring community doesn't happen by accident. We're committed to the work of nurturing community through what we call Life Groups.

Life Groups primary focus is how the boundless riches of Christ can meet us and renew us amidst the realities we face each day. At Life Group you can expect to eat, pray, study the Bible, and share celebrations and struggles and how God is working in each other's lives.

As we look into Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and other studies, our prayer is:

- that we will receive afresh the freeing and transforming grace of God in the gospel; as well as
- be people who grow in the practical God-centered Wisdom Jesus calls us to live out in His world.

For more info on Life groups, contact our Connect Pastor, Steve Nation

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**Note:** We give thanks for the kind permission given by Tim Collins for the use of his Bible Studies. His work formed the base of the studies below. You can find out more about Tim here:

<http://www.pas.rochester.edu/~tim/>

## Suggestions for getting the most out of Life Groups<sup>1</sup>

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1. Know the purpose of Life Groups. God is about maturing His people into the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13). What bigger vision is there than to become like Jesus?! By knowing and depending on Him, we can become like him. With the Spirit's help, we can act like him, speak like him, love like him, pray like him, evangelize like him. Life Groups are one of the key means we believe that God will grow us into maturity.
2. Come to the study prepared. Come to be stirred by the love of Christ, and thus be moved to love God and to love neighbour. Come expecting change. Look over the study beforehand, and pray for yourself and the group: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Ephesians 1:17).
3. Be willing to participate in the discussion. The leader of your group will not be lecturing. Instead, he or she will be encouraging the members of the group to discuss what they have learned. The leader will be asking the questions that are found in this study.
4. Stick to the topic being discussed. Your answers should be based on the verses which are the focus of the discussion and not on outside authorities such as commentaries or speakers. These studies focus on a particular passage of Scripture. Only rarely should you refer to other portions of the Bible. This allows for everyone to participate in in-depth study on equal ground.
5. Be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen attentively when they describe what they have learned. You may be surprised by their insights! Each question assumes a variety of answers. Many questions do not have "right" answers, particularly questions that aim at meaning or application. Instead the questions push us to explore the passage more thoroughly. When possible, link what you say to the comments of others. Also, be affirming whenever you can. This will encourage some of the more hesitant members of the group to participate.
6. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. We are sometimes so eager to express our thoughts that we leave too little opportunity for others to respond. By all means participate! But allow others to also.
7. Expect God to teach you through the passage being discussed and through the other members of the group. Pray that you will have an enjoyable and profitable time together, but also that as a result of the

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Getting the Most Out of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, IVP LifeGuides

study you will find ways that you can take action individually and/or as a group.

8. Remember that anything said in the group is considered confidential and should not be discussed outside the group unless specific permission is given to do so.



## Bibles for the Persecuted Church

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The purpose of the Bible League is to serve the under-resourced church globally through the provision of Bibles, biblical resources and training to transform lives worldwide through God's Word and help people meet Jesus.

### ***What is Bibles for the Persecuted?***

Taking part in the program will help each church member to identify with persecuted Christians and *personally* provide encouragement to persecuted believers through the provision of prayer and Bibles.

We at St Matt's will be taking part in this program from **August 18-September 8.**





## **What Does The Bible Say About Depression and Anxiety?**

May 19, 2017 by Stephen Altrogge<sup>2</sup>

Talking to Christians about mental illness is like a box of chocolates: you never know what you're going to get.

Some Christians will tell you that depression and anxiety are purely spiritual battles to be heroically conquered with more faith, more Bible reading, and more time spent hunkered down in the proverbial (or literal) prayer closet.

Others will say that it's only a physical issue and that the only sure solution is going to the doctor and loading up on meds.

And still, others will come up with wild theories about demonic attacks and the end times and the Illuminati. Talking to them makes you wonder if something is wrong with them.

But what does the Bible say about depression and anxiety?

It's the million dollar question, right? Depending on what you believe, you can end up with wildly different approaches on how to think through mental illness.

It's important to get this one right.

So let's take a look. What does the Bible have to say about depression and anxiety?

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<sup>2</sup> <https://theblazingcenter.com/2017/05/what-does-the-bible-say-about-depression-and-anxiety.html>

## **The Bible Says “Nothing” About Depression and Anxiety (sort of)**

In one sense, scripture says nothing about mental illness. At this point, some of you are punching your fist in the air and saying, “Yes, I knew it! All those therapeutic namby-pambies are believing a lie!”

Not so fast.

The Bible doesn’t say anything about mental illness in the same way it doesn’t say anything about the Trinity. In other words, you’re not going to find the words “depression”, “anxiety”, “bipolar”, or anything else.

But just because those specific terms aren’t in scripture doesn’t mean that scripture is silent on the issue.

In fact, mental illness is everywhere in the Bible.

## **We Was Beat When We Was Born**

In the movie Newsies, Jack Kelly (played by a super young Christian Bale) says the phrase, “We was beat when we was born.”

He’s referring to the fact that the poor kids of New York were defeated from the moment they were born, and would never have a chance to succeed.

We too were beat when we were born.

The moment sin entered the world, everything went to pieces. The perfect world God created was suddenly, violently shattered. Things that once worked perfectly, like the gears of a Swiss clock, began to shift and grind and groan and shutter.

Bodies began decomposing and everyone’s death clock started ticking. The soil rebelled, spewing out thorns and weeds and poisonous plants. Suddenly, nothing worked as it should and chaos began its reign of terror.

In Reformed circles, [this is referred to] as total depravity. It simply means that sin has infected the totality of our being. Our bodies and emotions and souls are all under the oppressive dominion of the darkness.

Total depravity means our world is broken. Our bodies are broken. Our brains are broken. This is why Paul says in Romans 8:22-24:

*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

Mental illness should not surprise us. When sin entered the world, so did cancer and colds and ebola and Zika and, yes, mental illness. Our bodies (brain included) groan for the redemption that Jesus is bringing.

What does the Bible say about depression and anxiety? Nothing. And everything.

### **The Bible Is Filled With Depression and Anxiety**

Not only do we find evidence of mental illness in our total depravity, we see it in action in numerous godly men and women.

When you read the Psalms, it often seems like David has sunk incredibly low. Obviously, we don't know if David was depressed in the medical sense, but his words indicate that he was often in the depths of despair and darkness.

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?*

*Psalms 13:1-2*

These aren't the words of a guy having a bad day. David isn't just a bit bummed out or disappointed. He is clearly crushed under the weight of sadness. He has sorrow in his heart all day every day.

This sounds very much like the experience of those who have been levelled by depression.



As we walk through church history, we see numerous other examples of godly men and women who were absolutely crippled by depression.

In a sermon entitled “The Christian’s Heaviness and Rejoicing”, Charles Spurgeon said that during an illness:

...my spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for ... a kind friend was telling me of some poor old soul living near, who was suffering very great pain, and yet she was full of joy and rejoicing. I was so distressed by the hearing of that story, and felt so ashamed of myself.

The great hymn writer William Cowper was also afflicted by absolutely crushing depression. When he was 21, he wrote:



(I was struck) with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who have felt the same, can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair.

**WILLIAM  
COWPER**



Cowper was so oppressed by the darkness that he even tried to commit suicide and was eventually put into an asylum for his own good.

When we think through the question of, “What does the Bible say about depression and anxiety?” we need to look first to the Scriptures and then to the testimony of church history.

From Scripture, we know that depression and anxiety affect the entirety of a person, just like any other physical disease. A person who is dealing with multiple sclerosis will need wise medical help and sweet spiritual counsel. The same goes for a person buried under depression or anxiety. There has to be a holistic, physical and spiritual approach.

When a friend is clearly in the unshakeable grip of physical depression, I recommend that they see a doctor. I don’t make medical recommendations or tell them about this one time that I was feeling sad and took this supplement and it cheered me up. I know that there is something broken in their body that needs to be fixed.

I also gently encourage them with God’s word. I don’t correct them for their lack of faith in God’s promises. I don’t tell them not to worry. I remind them of God’s love, his delight in them. His nearness to the broken-hearted. His refusal to break a bruised reed.

They probably won’t feel any different when I tell them these things, but that’s not the point. I want them to know that I love them and that God does too. Most of the time, presence is more helpful than words.

And I certainly don’t give them a book to read. They can barely get through the day, let alone make their way through a book. A single verse will do. Spiritual medicine must be administered slowly and it often takes weeks to begin working.

### **This Really Matters**

The answer to the question, “What does the Bible say about depression and anxiety?” matters because people matter. When you get the answer wrong, people get hurt.

As G.I. Joe was fond of saying, “Knowing is half the battle.” And it’s true. Once we know what Scripture says, then we can fight the other half of the battle and minister effectively.





## Introducing the Sermon on the Mount<sup>3</sup>

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Matthew 5 begins with Jesus having just called his first disciples to follow him (4:19, 21), and they have enthusiastically responded to his call to join him in gathering people into the kingdom in the same way they once gathered fish from the sea (4:19, 13:47). Now Jesus begins to teach his disciples how their own lives can serve as examples to others of what the kingdom of God will look like when it comes (5:1-7:29).

“The Sermon on the Mount” (chs. 5-7) is structurally similar to the Mosaic law. Like the Mosaic law, it begins with a reminder of God’s blessing and grace. The first five beatitudes (5:3-7) emphasize that God’s blessing comes to those who understand their need of his mercy, just as the Mosaic law begins with a reminder of God’s gracious rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt (Ex 19:4, 20:2). Also like the Mosaic law, the Sermon on the Mount describes the way of life that God calls his people to display as a means of showing the world the character of its Creator. Israel was to be a kingdom of priests, mediating God’s character and will for the rest of humanity to all the earth (Ex 19:5-6). Jesus’ followers are to be salt and light in the world so that it might see their good works and glorify God (Matt 5:13-16). In addition, both the Mosaic law and the Sermon on the Mount end with a description of the blessing that comes to those who follow their teaching and the trouble that comes to those who disobey (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28–30; cf. Matt. 7:24–27).

It is important to avoid two errors in interpreting the “Sermon on the Mount.

“First, it is not a description of the requirements for *entering* the kingdom of God. Jesus taught this material to those who had already responded to his call to follow him (4:18–22; 5:1).

Second, it is not an idealistic description of the way life will function after God has fully established his kingdom in the

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<sup>3</sup> The Gospel Transformation Bible, Crossway Publishers

future. In that day, there will be no need to turn the other cheek (5:39).

Rather, these teachings are a description of what life looks like for followers of Jesus as they try to be faithful to him and to the values of God's kingdom in a world that God has not yet fully transformed. They are about living as ambassadors of God's kingdom in a foreign land. In short, the Sermon shows us what life should look like for a heart that has been melted and transformed by the gospel of grace, while also making clear the true nature of God's standards of righteousness—high standards which mean that our right standing with God is ultimately dependent on the grace of the One who tells us of them.



## Study #1. The blessed ones, Matt 5:1-12

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### *for starters*

**How would you define the word “blessed”? Each member write their definition on a piece of paper. Collect and read each definition, letting the group guess who wrote each one. What do the responses reveal about their authors?**

### BACKGROUND

The beatitude was a standard Old Testament (OT) statement from God to people. Examples include:

“Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” (Ps 2:12)

“Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven” (Ps 32:1)

“Blessed is the one who makes the LORD their trust, who does not look to the proud” (Ps 40:4)

“Blessed is the one who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers them in times of trouble.” (Ps 41:1)

“But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.” (Jer 17:7-8)

Much hangs on the word “blessed”, the Greek *makarios*, which has this healthy range of meanings: “favored, blessed, fortunate, happy, privileged” (BDAG): The Beatitudes come like a bolt out of the blue for any who think of religion as a sad and miserable affair. Maybe ‘religion’ is. But the kingdom of God is quite different. In participating, we are the way God meant us to be, and so it is inevitably the happy life. And that is what Blessed means: made happy by God. It is as if Jesus is saying that life in the kingdom with him is a life of profound joy, a joy that no person can take away. And this blessedness is not reserved for some

*Read Matthews 5:1-12*

## 1. The poor

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“The poor, God’s poor, were already a clearly defined group in the OT. For ‘the poor’ were not so much the poverty stricken as the pious who—partly because they were needy, downtrodden, oppressed or in other ways afflicted—had put their faith and hope in God”<sup>4</sup>. So we read in Isa 66:2, *“All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word.”*

**a. We increase psychological well-being by focusing on what we can control. At the same time, we grow as Christians by focusing on our spiritual helplessness and dependence on God. Aren’t these at odds?**

They shouldn’t be. To know that don’t have the spiritual resources necessary to carry out God’s demands means we lean onto God for help, and in His grace, by His Spirit, He leads us into character-attributes such as ‘self-control’ (Galatians 5:22-23).

**b. What times in your life have you felt most poverty of spirit? How can you cultivate this? Is it better to concentrate on your smallness or God’s bigness?**

## 2. The meek

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This beatitude echoes Ps 37:11. Who are the meek in the following passages?

- a) Ps 37:11 – those who will inherit the land, enjoy peace and prosperity
- b) Col 3:12 (here “gentleness”) – God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved
- c) 1 Peter 3:15-17 – God’s witnesses who revere Christ as Lord

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<sup>4</sup> Stott, 32



- d) James 1:19-21 (described here as those who “humbly accept”). Brothers and sisters (family), who have God’s Word planted in them

**In light of what you have seen above, what does it mean to be meek? What person aside from Jesus best embodies this characteristic?**

### **3. Those who mourn**

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This beatitude uses the vocabulary of *Isaiah 61:2-3* (read). **Who was Isaiah consoling, and in what did that consolation consist? What light does this passage shed on the who, what, why and when of the beatitudes?**

The poor, broken-hearted, captives, prisoners, mourners, the despairing. Jesus didn’t come to help the healthy (self-righteous) but the sick (sinners and sufferers)

The fruit of the Spirit from Galatians are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” These are understood to increase as we become more Christlike. **Is the same true of the qualities commended by the beatitudes: poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacefulness, and being persecuted?**

To some degree. There is considerable overlap. But there’s also some difference – those who have the fruit of the Spirit are by their (new) nature now able to give to those who are destitute. They have the empowering from the Holy Spirit.

**Which of the qualities described in the beatitudes do you most resonate with? Which, if any, do you feel you need to cultivate? Aside from “read the Bible and pray more”, how might you go about this?**

## **Sermon Notes. The blessed ones, Matt 5:1-16 (Aug 18)**

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## Optional Study for later. Salt and Light. Matt 5:13-20

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### *for starters*

**Who has been like a Bible for you, showing in their life what God is like? What did that person say or do that showed God to you?**

### **Salt of the earth (5:13)**

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There were eleven functions of salt in the biblical world: “accompanying sacrifice, part of a covenant, purifying water, a condiment for food, a preservative, a necessity for life, a sign of loyalty, peace, gracious speech, wisdom, and beloved of the gods”<sup>5</sup>.

- 1. From sermons you’ve heard and books you’ve read, what is the salient (hah) feature of salt which Jesus is ascribing to his disciples in 5:13?**

Stott explains both the salt and light metaphors in this way:

The world is evidently a dark place, with little or no light of its own, since an external source of light I needed to illumine it... The world also manifests a constant tendency to deteriorate. The notion is not that the world is tasteless and that Christians can make it less insipid..., but that it is putrefying. It cannot stop itself from going bad. Only salt introduced from outside can do this. The church, on the other hand, is set in the world with a double role, as salt to arrest—or at least hinder—the process of social decay, and as light to dispel the darkness. (Stott, 39)

- 2. How does the church universal act as a preservative for the world? (Is there a clue in the position of this passage in the**

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<sup>5</sup> Blomberg, “The Most Often Abused Verses in the Sermon on the Mount,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 46 (2004), 1.

**Sermon?) From this passage, is this preservative role passive, a natural byproduct of our Christian lives, or does it require active, deliberate action?**

The church is the people of God. The people of God are created to be different, and are consciously to be different from those around us. There are many ways we are to be salty – as we do our jobs, we are preserving society through the way we preserve life and give hope to people, place and things. We are salty when we speak the gospel, give words of kindness and compassion, truth and wisdom, and act graciously and carefully to all we meet.

### **Light of the world (5:14-17)**

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**3. As salt, we prevent the spread of evil. How does the church's role as light complement its role as salt?**

Light reveals whatever can't be seen due to the darkness. The church is like a 3-watt nightlight compared to the blazing glory of the Son of God (John 8:12). We are light, revealing Jesus to people. So unlike salt (which preserves life), our light points deliberately and obviously to Jesus.

*[In history] the faithful and divinely empowered proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ... so transformed people that they in turn became the light of the world (Mt 5:14). Prison reform, medical care, trade unions, control of a perverted and perverting liquor trade, abolition of slavery, abolition of child labor, establishment of orphanages, reform of the penal code—in all these areas the followers of Jesus spearheaded the drive for righteousness. The darkness was alleviated. And this, I submit, has always been the pattern when professing Christians have been less concerned with personal prestige and more concerned with the norms of the kingdom.<sup>6</sup>*

**4. How is the modern church following this example?**

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<sup>6</sup> D.A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*, Baker (2004), p. 33.

**5. If our good works are un-hideable, why is Jesus telling his disciples to “let your light shine”?**

Because this is our life calling – Ephesians 2:10. There is never an end to the good works we can do for others – and often good works are not automatic, but need thought and planning to meet the needs around us.

**6. Acting as light requires the church’s actions be both righteous and public. How do we accomplish the latter when the media focus predominantly on the church’s many missteps?**

Jesus can be our model. He was often publically misunderstood and disliked. His mission wasn’t a publicity campaign, nor a crusade for morals. He loved all people equally. He spoke truth, but in timely ways. Most of all, He asked questions of others – seeking to understand them as people and lead them towards faith in Himself.

## **Jesus and the Law (5:17-20)**

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**7. The Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament) consists of doctrine, prophecy and ethical teachings. In what sense has Jesus fulfilled each of these?**

Jesus is the ultimate and perfect revelation about the truth of God (He is the Word of God and about God in the most specific sense – Hebrews 1:1-2); all God’s prophetic promises find their fulfilment in Jesus (2 Cor 1:20); and Jesus is both the Life and Way that makes sense of this world and how to live in it (John 14:6)

**8. If Jesus fulfilled the Law, what is to be our relationship to the law? See Matthew 22:34-40. What might this look like for you this week?**

The Law can be summed up with a life of wholehearted love towards God and those around us. The New Testament gives us the picture and teaching of how we are to do this in light of the work of Christ and gift of His Spirit.

## Study #2. The Antitheses. Matt 5:21-30

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### *for starters*

**What advice would you give to someone who is struggling to get on with an irritating individual?**

### **Murder and anger (read 5:21-26)**

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The six passages in 5:21-48 which are structured around phrases like “you have heard it said.... but I say to you” are traditionally called the Antitheses.

1. The first of the antitheses condemns being angry with one’s brother or sister (5:22). **Yet what do we read in the following about Jesus?**
  - Mt 21:12 – violent action to cleanse the temple
  - Mt 23:17 – words of warning towards foolish and false teachers
  - Mk 3:1-6 – anger towards peoples stubborn hearts
2. **Jesus got very angry sometimes?’ Is Jesus guilty of inconsistency?**

No, because Jesus’ anger is righteous, but in Matthew 5 is speaking about murderous anger (see also Ephesians 4:26)

“Indeed there is a place for burning with anger at sin and injustice. Our problem is that we burn with indignation and anger, not at sin and injustice, but at offense to ourselves. In none of the cases in which Jesus became angry was his personal ego wrapped up in the issue. More telling yet, when he was unjustly arrested, unfairly tried, illegally beaten, contemptuously spit upon, crucified, mocked, when in fact he

had every reason for his ego to be involved, then, as Peter says, ‘he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats’ (1 Peter 2:23). From his parched lips came for rather those gracious words, ‘Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’ (Lk 23:34).” Carson also notes that the examples Jesus gives—being angry at a brother or sister; saying raka (“empty head”); and not reconciling with someone who has something against you—are all in the context of personal relationships. He concludes that Jesus forbids “not all anger but the anger which arises out of personal relationships.”<sup>7</sup>

**3. What do you think?**

**4. Which do you find harder to swallow about this first antithesis, that Jesus sets such a challenging standard or that the fires of hell are threatened?**

Occasionally we are insulted by someone who neither knows nor cares who we are. Maybe we are cut off on the road or treated rudely by a phone-sales person, for instance. Or maybe the angering rudeness comes from a colleague, someone who rightly or wrongly believes he or she knows us. Swallowing this slight or insult without retaliation or justification can feel like drinking a tall glass of ipecac, and even be physically unpleasant or painful.

**5. Do you experience this? How difficult do you find it to hold back an ungodly response? Is there anything you’ve found makes this easier?**

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<sup>7</sup> Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World (2004), pp. 44-45.

6. **Have you ever had someone approach you seeking forgiveness or reconciliation? How might you need to put this into practice?**

### **Lust and adultery (read Matthew 5:27-30)**

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Jesus articulates an important principle, one so important Matthew repeats it in 18:8-9: That we are not merely to try not to sin, we are to try to stay the hell away from sin—to “deal drastically with sin. We must not pamper it, flirt with it, enjoy nibbling a little of it around the edges. We are to hate it, crush it, dig it out<sup>8</sup>”

7. **How have you found it helpful to voluntarily limit what you see, where **you go** or **what you do**?**

Remember in our Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount section, we read what the Sermon is and isn't: “First, it is not a description of the requirements for *entering* the kingdom of God. Jesus taught this material to those who had already responded to his call to follow him (4:18–22; 5:1).

Whereas in the Antitheses Jesus directs his disciple toward a lifestyle which follows the spirit of the law, Paul in Galatians describes the fruit of such a lifestyle: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control’.

8. **How might seeing the above in positive terms as well as negative help us live well in response to Jesus' teaching?**

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Carson, 46



## **Sermon notes. Salt and Light. Matt 5:17-48 (Aug 25)**

## Study #3. Living as peacemakers, Matt 5:31-48

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### *for starters*

Who is the most faithful person you know? Explain.

### Marriage (5:31-32)

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1. **What is the contrast between “what was said” and Jesus says? Read Matthew 19:1-9 for more context and explanation. What is the motivation for people in asking Jesus about divorce, and why and what is Jesus’ response?**

What was said was the ease of which a man could divorce his wife in the time of Moses (the consequences being brutal to the woman having little opportunities and hope for the future). Contrastingly, Jesus has a very high view of marriage – in Matthew 19, Jesus grounds the purpose of marriage and who marriage is designed for in creation (Genesis 2:24-25). Sin has affected marriage, but never makes null and void God’s purposes for marriage.

### Speech (5:33-37)

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#### BACKGROUND

- The OT allowed swearing of oaths, even using the name of God, but required that vows in God’s name be fulfilled: Numbers 30:20
- Several times Paul swears by the name of God: 2 Corinthians 1:23 (see also Rom 1:9; Gal 1:20; Philip 1:8).
- In fact, even God swears on his own name: Genesis 22:16-17)

**2. Why would Jesus move from talking of divorce to speaking about oaths? What might this tell us about His opposition to oaths? What does this mean for us today?**

The point is that citizens of the kingdom are so different, so radically honest, that they always tell the truth. They keep their promises. They don't need to "cross their hearts," raise their hand, or place their hand on the Bible. They are (and everyone should see) uncommonly honest because they have chosen to live their new life in Christ as those radically changed by the gospel.

## **Facing hostility (5:38-48)**

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**3. What strikes you from this passage? What do you think Jesus is saying?**

### **BACKGROUND**

In verse 38, Jesus quotes Lev 24:20: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." This, the law of retribution, or *lex talionis*, "was standard ancient Near Eastern law..., except that most legal collections besides the OT varied the punishments according to one's social class."

All versions of the law were meant to prevent feuds by limiting retribution and putting it in the hand of the state. (Lev 24 is written for magistrates administering the law.) The OT version further leveled class distinctions

*Jesus' illustrations and personal example depict not the weakling who offers no resistance. He himself challenged the high priest when questioned by him in court [John 18:19-23]. They depict rather the strong person whose control of themselves and love for others are so powerful that they rejects absolutely every conceivable form of retaliation. ...Christ's illustrations are not to be taken as the charter for any unscrupulous tyrant, ruffian, beggar or thug. His purpose was to forbid revenge, not to encourage injustice, dishonesty or vice.*

*True love, caring for both the individual and society, takes action to deter evil and to promote good. And Christ's command...*

*teaches not the irresponsibility which encourages evil but the forbearance which renounces revenge. Authentic Christian non-resistance is non-retaliation.”<sup>9</sup>*

Another author points out, “In first-century Palestine, few ‘safe’ options existed for nonviolent social protests against the Romans; the Romans viewed most public protest and linked with revolution, and punished it accordingly”<sup>10</sup> (ibid., 201). Let’s assume the central elements of this passage are: (i) a personal relationship; (ii) not retaliating within that relationship; (iii) seeking the good of the other, even at personal cost.

**4. Is there a form of non-violent resistance which includes these, but reflects the greater options available in a modern democracy which weren’t available to first-century citizens of Rome?**

### **Judging others (7:1-6)**

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The verb “judge” (Greek *krino*) in 7:1-2 has a range of meanings in Scripture, including (a) to discern; (b) to judge judicially; (c) to be judgmental (or censorious); (d) to condemn. While interpreting this passage we might recall the following verses which encourage discernment or judgment:

- We are to identify “swine” and “dogs” (Mt 7:6) and false prophets (Mt 7:15)
- We are to exercise discipline within the body of Christ where appropriate (Mt 18:15; 1 Cor 5:5, 11)
- We are responsible for judging wisely, not by appearances: In 7:24: “Do not judge (*krinete*) by appearances, but judge with right judgment”

Now consider two other passages on judging in which Paul and James seem to have this saying of Jesus in mind:

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<sup>9</sup> Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture*, 108

<sup>10</sup> Craig Keener, *Matthew*, 2001

- *Rom 14:5, 10: "Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds... Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God."*
- *James 5:9: "Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!"*

### **5. Which of Carson's four possible meanings of "judge" is intended in Mt 7:1-5?**

B and D. It is clear that we should make judgements – but only once we have dealt with our own sin and how we might not be assessing the situation properly. Blind, ignorant and sinful judgements are evil.

Some rabbis said that God had two measures by which he assessed men, the measure of justice and the measure of mercy. It may be that Jesus in 7:2 is using this belief to drive home his point— the measure we use, of these two, will be applied to us. For example, suppose we come across a wretched liar. How do we look upon them? If we measure them by justice alone, we will be very critical and condemning. But that measure will then be turned on us: How truthful are we? How often do we slant reports and stories to make a point or earn favour? Or perhaps we apply the standard of justice to the adulterer or prostitute. How will we fare when the same standard is applied to us, especially in light of Mt 5:27-30? Or again, perhaps we apply God's standard of justice to wealthy people who exploit the poor by unfair practices and greed. But how often have we been greedy? How often have we robbed others of value for money (even, for example, in our work)? Do we really want the standard of God's justice to be applied to ourselves in the way we are prone to apply it to others?

6.

**Which people evoke judgmentalism in you? How does this differ from simple recognition of sins? What can you do to avoid judgmentalism without falling into indifference or “moral apathy” (Carson)?**

*God has judged Jesus in our place. If we are united to Christ through his cross, our end-time judgment is already behind us. We are therefore liberated from judging others, because of our lavish exoneration through the free grace of Christ (Frank Thielman)*

**Sermon notes: Congruence: inside and out. Matt  
6:1-18 (Sept 1)**

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## Study #4: Congruence: inside and out (Matt 6:1-18)

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### *for starters*

All Christians are hypocrites! Discuss.

There's a theme running through this section of the Sermon on the Mount - and it's all about what it will look like for Israel to turn back to God with "all their heart and soul." Acts of "religion" are fertile ground for wrong attitudes. It's easy to do good religious things like praying, giving and fasting for all the wrong reasons.

*Read 6:1-18.* Look for repeating words and ideas.

**1. Which verse do you think best summarises the whole section?  
Why?**

6:1. Because this section is about being consistent in our faith and actions - in both private and public.

### **Giving (6:1-4, 19-24)**

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#### **What do we learn about giving in these verses?**

Our use (or non-use) of the money we have is one of the key tests of a) where our allegiances/life purpose lie; and b) the health of our life and discipleship. In verse 3, Jesus assumes that his disciples give to the needy ("when you give to the needy");

Note: In 6:22-23 Jesus talks about the eye as the "lamp" of the body, saying "if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light." Here "healthy" is *aplous*, or "single," in the sense of single-mindedness. This same expression was used to refer to generosity and righteousness, and to translate the Hebrew term for "perfect" in the Septuagint. By contrast, the "unhealthy" or literally "evil" eye was both stingy (or jealous or greedy) as well as one that could not see properly.



## 2. What does true 'health' look like in this passage?

Where your reputation and ego is taken out of the picture; a lack of preoccupation with material things; a consistent investment in the things of God.

### Praying (6:5-15)

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The Lord's Prayer begins with a uniquely personal address, "Father," one which is characteristic of Jesus' prayers, the only prayer without it being the one from the cross (which is also a quote from Ps 22). It is believed that Father (Pater) translates the Aramaic Abba, of which Dunn writes,

*The reason why abba would be so little used in presumably because it was typically a family word, or expressive of a degree of intimacy or reverence which would be characteristic of children (but not just little children) within the family circle, or of disciples of a loved and revered teacher.<sup>11</sup>*

## 3. What do you think of when you pray the opening petitions of the Lord's Prayer? (verses 9-10)

God's Fatherly affection; His greatness, His Kingdom that has come, is now come, and will come in all its fullness

## 4. The Lord's Prayer uses the plural in the second triad of petitions (vv.11-13): "give us today our daily bread." Give us this daily bread. For us, the picture is one of need and contentment, in an accumulating culture. In a grasping, holding, desiring, wanting, needing, demanding, entitlement... **why is the focus on 'us' instead of 'me'?**

Because God meets the needs of his followers largely through the generosity of those among his people who have more than others.

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<sup>11</sup> D.G. Dunn, Prayer

## **Fasting (6:16-18)**

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BACKGROUND: In the OT we see fasting used to “seek a safe journey” (Ezra 8:21+); in preparation for a difficult task (Esther 4:16); in order to share the resources with the needy (Job 31:16+; Isa 58:1+); when seeking discernment (Dan 9:3); to humble ourselves before God (Ps 35:13; Isa 58:3, 5); and when in mourning (Ps 35:14).

Notice that he does not say, 'If you fast...' but 'When you fast...' He takes it for granted that they will fast.”<sup>12</sup>

- 5. Should fasting be an occasional or regular part of Christian living? How would you advise a younger Christian to fast?**

See page 46 of booklet for more information on fasting

- 6. Which of the three spiritual disciplines (giving, prayer or fasting) do you need to grow in? How will you do this?**

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<sup>12</sup> The Message of Matthew (IVP, 2000), p. 102.

## **Sermon notes: Our Treasure, Our Worries. Matt 6:19-34 (Sept 8)**

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## Study #5: Our Treasure, Our Worries.

### Matt 6:19-34

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#### *for starters*

**What causes you most anxiety? Why?**

In 6:19-24 Jesus addresses general earthly pursuits. In 6:25-34 worry over the basic needs of food, drink and clothing (and “your body”; 25) are addressed. This passage culminates in the promise of v. 33: “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” We may note three things about this promise:

- The promise regards basic needs; However we understand this promise it can't preclude the sort of suffering Jesus and Paul and the other disciples experienced
  - The promise is made to a community of believers; the “you” in this passage is plural: “Seeking God's kingdom means valuing what God values and obeying his commands: it is when his people care for others in need among them that God supplies the needs of his people as a whole, perhaps because then he can best trust them to use his gifts righteously (Deut 15:1-11...).”
  - The promise follows the antecedent “strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”
1. **Given these three points, does this promise even address the things which make you anxious?**

- 2. What about the “~200,000,000 Christians worldwide (to say nothing of other people) living below any reasonable poverty line”? Do we really have the temerity to conclude they are all suffering because they are failing to pursue God's kingdom? How do we understand this passage without so qualifying it that it is emptied of power?**

The context of this passage is the generosity of God's people (or the lack thereof). Jesus urges his followers to find their ultimate security not in wealth but in God who will meet their needs. God meets the needs of his followers largely through the generosity of those among his people who have more than others. The biggest question isn't why there is so much suffering in the world; its where are God's people who are storing (hoarding) so much, when so many go without

We have been given so much in Christ. It is our glad privilege to give to others, honouring and reflecting his own compassion.

Consider the following reading of 6:19-34:

A soldier must trust to the supply chain for basic needs nor be distracted by concerns over food and clothing, but is to focus on his mission, trusting that his or her superior officer is handling these things. As soldier he may face privation at times in the course of duty. Similarly, we are to focus on our mission, and can validly trust that God know what we need and we won't be neglected if not necessary. Furthermore, as a part of the (Lord's) army, we will sometimes be part of the supply chain of others.

- 3. How well does this metaphor fit the passage? (E.g., unlike the metaphorical soldier, we also look forward to an eternal future in the life to come)**
  
- 4. Share something in your life that tends to make you anxious. Is there something practical that you can take away from this passage that will help you to make progress in this area?**

5. What practical thing can you do in response to Jesus' command to "seek first His kingdom"? (v. 33)

**Sermon notes. Ask, seek, knock. Matt 7:7-14  
(Sept 15)**

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## Study #6: Ask, seek, knock. Matt 7:7-14

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### *for starters*

When the world sees a nasty person who, as a parent, gives good gifts to his child, it says, “Deep down this is a good person.” When Jesus sees a parent who gives good gifts to his child, he says, “...you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children...”

What are your initial thoughts on the above paragraph?

The ask/seek/knock saying of 7:7-11 constitutes three breathtaking, parallel promises.

- 1. This passage encourages boldness in prayer. What are we encouraged to request from God? How bold do your prayers get?**
- 2. How does verses 9-11 help us understand what we are to ask for? Bread and fish were staples of the Palestinian diet. Is this about prayer for necessities?**

Because God is so good, we can ask Him for anything, knowing that everything we need (plus sometimes more) will be given to us

- 3. How might this prayer for “good things” in general, bring to mind Ps 37:4, “Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart”?**



D.A. Carson writes of Matthew 7:7-11,

Sadly, many of God's children labor under the delusion that their heavenly Father extracts some malicious glee out of watching his children squirm now and then. Of course, they are not quite blaspheming to put it in such terms; but their prayer life reveals they are not thoroughly convinced of God's goodness and the love he has for them. Jesus' argument is *a fortiori*: If human fathers, who by God's standards of perfect righteousness can only be described as evil, know how to give good gifts to their children, *how much more* will God give good gifts to them who ask him? We are dealing with the God who once said to his people, 'Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!'...

**4. Do you believe that God is good? How do your prayers express what you believe about God?**

In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus says that the way of salvation is difficult. But he didn't say that all aspects of the Christian life must be difficult. Our expectation can lead us to believe that life must be hard, or we've substituted a false, easier gospel. If life's not tough, we must be compromised. If you ever become comfortable you clearly are in danger of stagnating. This attitude can also affect our reading of Scripture. We read a passage and look for the interpretation which makes life hardest.

**5. What do you find hardest in the Christian life?**

**6. Jesus also taught that his yoke is easy, and his burden light (Mt 11:30). Are there elements of Christian life which you choose to see as hard, which needn't be? How many of your burdens added by you, and not Christ?**

## **Sermon notes. True Disciples, Matthew 7:13-29 (Sept 22)**

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## Study #7. True Disciples, Matthew 7:15-29

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### *for starters*

**Discuss:** John Chrysostom has an interesting take on the false prophets referred to in this passage: “It does not seem to me that ‘false prophets’ here refers to the heretics but rather to person who live morally corrupt lives while wearing a mask of virtue. They are usually called frauds by most people.” Whether or not he is right in his identification of the “wolves,” it is a good reminder that to draw some “sheep” astray it is sufficient for a member of the church who compromises in his discipleship.

#### **1. Jesus presents false prophets as not bearing spiritual fruit. From Mt 5-7, what might “fruit” refer to?**

Love instead of hate, faithfulness instead of adultery, honesty instead of lying, non-violent resistance instead of violence, looking after others needs instead of our own reputation and benefits, going without for the good of others, humble prayer, patient trust in God, being a peacemaker...

Jesus provides the *fruit test* to detect these disguised false prophets by their character, which we see from 12:33-37 is revealed in their words—“every careless word you utter.” Paul and 1 John add to this a *doctrinal test*—are the teachings consistent with Scripture? Paul gives a further test, which is the *effect* their teaching has on their followers: Does it “eat its way like gangrene” and upset their faith (2 Tim 2:17- 18; cf. Stott 202-3) , promoting ungodliness (2 Tim 2:16) and division (1 Tim 6:4; 2 Tim 2:23; Tit 1:11, 3:9)?

#### **2. Can you think of an example of a false teacher who has arisen in a church you've been a part of? What safeguards are in place to prevent false teachers from gaining influence? Do they work?**

The words “LORD, LORD” are paralleled by these famous verses from the Apostle James:

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (2:16-17)*

**3. In light of the above, read Matthew 7:24-27. What is the place of faith and works in the Christian life?**

Discuss, then read page 47 (“Why then must we still do good”) of this booklet

We’ve now finished our journey through Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

**4. How does Matthew 7:24-27 function as the final words, application even?**

**5. Where do you need to live out your life with Jesus with greater effort and purpose? How will you do this?**

## Fasting<sup>13</sup>

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**The focus of fasting should not be on the lack of food.**

Fasting from food can be done for a variety of purposes, either physical or spiritual. So abstaining from food alone doesn't constitute a Christian fast. Instead, a Christian fast is accompanied by a special focus on prayer during the fast, often substituting the time you'd spend eating with prayer.

**Fasting provides a real-life illustration of dependency.**

Although modern man thrives on the idea of being independent, beholden to no one, fasting helps you put the facts in the proper perspective. It's easy to believe in your independence with a full stomach, but when you start to feel hunger pains in your belly after missing a meal or two, you awaken to your body's dependency on food to survive. Fasting reveals a physical reliance on food that points to the ultimate dependency – the fact that you're dependent on God for things far more important than food.

**Fasting fosters concentration on God and his will.**

Oswald Chambers once said that fasting means "concentration," because when you're fasting, you have a heightened sense of attentiveness. Food or any physical sensation can satisfy, fill you up, and dull your senses and spiritual ears. In contrast, a hungry stomach makes you more aware and alert to what God is trying to say to you.

**Fasting offers a way to impose self-control in your life.**

It gives you a "splash in the face" to awaken you to the need for the personal strength of will that you need to grow spiritually. When you restrain yourself physically, you'll find it easier to apply this same self-discipline in your spiritual life.

One last thing – everyone can participate. Not everyone may be able to fast from food (pregnant women and diabetics for example), but everyone can give up something in order to focus on God (e.g. unplugging the television for 24 hours could also be an effective way of joining the fast)!

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<sup>13</sup> **Source: Richard Wagner, Christianity for Dummies.**

## Why Then Must We Still Do Good?<sup>14</sup>

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There are at least five reasons we who have been saved by grace alone through faith alone must still do good.

1. **Fruit.** Good works are the fruit of which justification is the root. If we have the grace of God inside us we will have something of the grace showing through to the outside. “Christ by his Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself.”

2. **Gratitude.** Good works show to God and to the world that we have much to be thankful for (Rom. 6:13; 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:5-10). When we are grateful, the nastiness of vice and pride is pushed aside. In its place we consider all that God has done for us and instinctively—and supernaturally—aim to please the one who has shown us such mercy.

3. **Glorify.** Good works testify that God is worthy of our obedience and service (Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). He receives praise when people see his reflection in us. His majesty is magnified when others recognize that we consider him a God to be feared and a Father to be loved.

4. **Assurance.** Good works bear witness to our own hearts that we are children of God (Matt. 7:17-18; Gal. 5:22-24; 2 Pet. 1:10-11). As we spot good fruit growing in our lives, we should conclude that we, therefore, cannot be bad trees.

5. **Conversion.** Good works make our neighbours stand up and take notice (Matt. 5:14-16; Rom. 14:17-19; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:1-2). Our behaviour cannot, by itself, win sinners to Christ. But our good works can adorn the gospel and lead the lost to consider whether they are as found as they thought.

Good works are not optional for the Christian. We must do good, not as the means of our acceptance with God, but as an expression of it. In the lifelong pursuit of holiness, we would do well to consider all the biblical motivations for Christlikeness. For at one time or another, we will need them all. And so will the people God brings before us in need of similar transformation.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/why-then-must-we-still-do-good-2/>



# Prayer notes

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# Prayer notes

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