



# Sermon on the Mount

**LAUNCHING**  
A FIRM FOUNDATION

LENT DEVOTION GUIDE 2021

WELCOME TO THE  
*the World's*  
***Greatest***  
***Teaching***

Dr. Dave Mayo  
*Lead Pastor*



In the past five years, God has led us on an amazing journey. We are now preparing to construct a church building to serve as a launching pad to serve our community. As we enter our building campaign, we realize that our true foundation is found in Christ alone (Matthew 7:24-25) - So we begin with prayer and devotion.

In chapters 5-7 of Matthew's Gospel, we find the greatest sermon the world has ever known - Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon is quoted everyday by millions of people around the world (often without the quoter knowing the source). Anytime someone refers to the "meek inheriting the earth," or a person being "the salt of the earth," or "the Golden Rule," they are referencing the Sermon on the Mount.

But the Sermon is more than just memorable phrases - It is the world's most life-enhancing teaching. In this message Jesus outlines what it means to live as His disciple - A model of living that is distinct from anything the world has ever known. The title of the Sermon reminds us that it is delivered on a mountainside. The location draws parallels to a mountain scene in the history of Israel. It was at Mt. Sinai that God gave the Israelites the law (the Ten

Commandments) to govern their life as residents of the Promised Land. In a similar vein, at the Sermon on the Mount Jesus gives His followers the decree for how they are to live as residents of the Kingdom of God.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed the prayers and devotions for our 40-day journey. My hope is that as we journey together through this Prayer Guide and the daily online video devotions, we will be renewed to live the higher life that Christ offers His people.

Keep Shining,

Dave Mayo

WHY ANOTHER  
*Prayer*  
*Guide*

Tom Higgins



You may be thinking that the purpose of this prayer guide is to help increase the effectiveness of a capital campaign. After all, we had a prayer guide as part of the first one when we were successful in purchasing the property. So why not develop a prayer guide for the next fund-raising phase? But the reason we wrote the first prayer guide is the same reason this one exists. It is offered in hopes of facilitating our growth as disciples of our Lord and Savior. Critical to this growth is the study and mediation of Scripture followed by prayer.

As Christians, our responsibility is to continuously grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ. As Dave Mayo has said, "Christianity at its core is not really a religion; it's a relationship." A meaningful relationship is based on knowledge, the point clearly illustrated in chapter 1 of Ephesians. Despite all the pressing circumstances the Ephesians were facing, a major petition in Paul's prayer for them is to know God better. So where do we start in this quest? If we desire deeper and more meaningful communion with God, or to know God better, we start with God's Word. But just reading God's word may only lead to knowing more about God. According to J.I. Packer (*Knowing God*), in order to turn our

knowledge about God into knowledge of God, we meditate on the Word of God "leading to prayer and praise to God."

In his book *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, John Stott states, "Bible reading and prayer should always go together. For it is in Scripture that God discloses His will, and it is in prayer that we ask Him to do it." To have a meaningful relationship there must be constant communication. Starting with the Word is the beginning of the conversation with God we desire when we pray. Timothy Keller writes in *Prayer: Discovering the Awe and Intimacy of God*: "In the Bible...we can hear God speaking to us and we respond in prayer though this is not simply a response. Through the Word and the Holy Spirit prayer becomes answering God - a full conversation."

This prayer guide contains all 107 verses from the Sermon on the Mount along with commentaries by eight covenant partners and 40 prayers by Pat MacPherson. The commentaries and prayers are based on study and meditation of these verses. While we hope you read this prayer guide, only reading it is not sufficient. Much better for our growth as disciples is to meditate on

the Scripture and then write our own prayers. The long-honored spiritual discipline of meditating on Scripture to prepare for prayer is a tried-and-true way to facilitate growth as a disciple. It worked for great theologians of the past such as Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Calvin, and it works for us.

We hope this prayer journey through the Sermon on the Mount strengthens your faith and helps you to “get the sense of knowing God, a sense of feeling He is near and enjoying His presence” at a deeper and more profound level (Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*).

***“The life of true faith must have  
the passion and warmth  
of love and communion  
because communion with God  
is the crown and apex of  
religion.”***

John Murray  
Scottish Theologian

INTRODUCTION TO THE  
*Sermon on  
the Mount*

Pat MacPherson  
And Tom Higgins



***“Be holy, because  
I am holy.”***

1 Peter 1:16

# A CALL TO *Be Different*

Pat MacPherson

For some reason, the Bible verse to the left from Peter comes to mind when I hear mentioned, "Sermon on the Mount ." The reason is because of a weekend retreat that I attended in Colorado in 2018.

One of the keynote speakers placed great emphasis on our calling to follow Jesus as a calling to be holy. After a short introduction, he then launched into a dialogue on the Beatitudes. Struggling to tie the "be holy" to "a call" to the "Beatitudes," I remember wanting mental relief from the onslaught of statements passing through my ears and into my mind.

Then he paused and said..."be different, not better; not more, just different." Ok, well, I can do that, I thought. Much easier being different than "holy" or possessing the character captured by the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12), the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount.

Returning home, I was given David Martyn Lloyd-Jones' book, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*. Diving into that book, it all started to come together. The Sermon on the Mount

is Jesus' call to be a part of His kingdom. To be different from what this world was offering. Ultimately, to be holy because we answer the call to follow Him who makes us holy.

Studying the Sermon on the Mount was a highlight for the remainder of that year. I was reminded of how rich and quotable the chapters of Matthew 5-7 is.

*"if the salt loses its saltiness; I have not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill; let your 'yes' be 'yes' and 'no' be 'no'; turn the other cheek; pray for those that persecute you; do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; the Lord's Prayer; storing up treasures in heaven; do not worry; judging others; the plank in your own eye; the Golden Rule; the narrow gate; foundation on the rock" and so much more!*

We have an opportunity in front of us at MCC. It's an opportunity to answer our fundamental call as a church.

*To follow Jesus.*

Together, let's explore this call by praying through the Sermon on the Mount. Let us approach the Beatitudes as a calling on our personal lives

before Christ, and as a church body before Christ.

I invite you to intentionally commit to making a prayer journey with your brothers and sisters at MCC over the next 40 days; asking God to use this time for worship through the study of His Word in conforming us to His image.

# Kingdom Focused

Tom Higgins

What is the attraction of the 107 verses in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew's gospel? If you were to sit down and read it from beginning to end, it might take 10 minutes or even less. It has been called the best example of ethical teaching ever written, but to Christians it is much more. If we look at the Sermon on the Mount in the context of the entire Bible, it clearly expresses two major themes: (a) the call to be different, and (b) the inclusion of the Christian in the family of God.

John Stott (*Message from Sermon on the Mount*) states: "The essential theme of the whole Bible is God's historical purpose - to call out a people for himself, a 'holy people' set apart from the world to belong to him and to obey him - to be different in all its outlook and behavior." The Sermon on the Mount, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, describes this difference. It is Jesus' announcement of the good news that the kingdom of God promised in the Old Testament has arrived. The Sermon shows what life and community looks like in the kingdom of God. To Stott, the key verse is 6:8 - "Do not be like them..." This call to be different is

noted throughout all three chapters in Matthew. In each paragraph we are called to be different from the irreligious (the pagans and Gentiles) and the religious (the scribes and Pharisees). Today, this comparison can be made to the secular world and, on occasion, the nominal church. Simply put, this is behavior expected out of a disciple. Jesus is speaking to us as a church, and he meant this to be obeyed.

One of the many things I love about Marietta Community Church is the opportunity to participate in discipleship groups. One notable book in our studies was *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer. Packer believes the essence of a Christian is "one who has God as a Father ." He goes on to write that being adopted into God's family through faith in Jesus Christ is the highest blessing of the gospel, even higher than forgiveness of sins. This is because the richer relationship we have with God as our Father is intimate and deep, more so than justification which views God as the judge. It is fitting that in the first part of the first book of the New Testament Jesus proclaims this incredible blessing.

Think about how the Sermon on the Mount addresses the Father child relationship in conduct and prayer.

Regarding conduct, we are told to imitate the Father (5:44-45, 48). We are taught the principle of glorifying the Father (5:16). Finally, we read about the importance of pleasing the Father (6:1). In pleasing him, Packer says, we learn that the "purpose of reward (6:4, 6, 18) is ... to remind us that our heavenly Father will notice and show special pleasure when we concentrate on pleasing him and him alone ." In prayer, we are to address "Our Father" (6:9) and are praying to someone who has intimate knowledge of us (6:7-8). We are told to be unafraid to ask for anything because we can count on his love (7:7-11).

One of MCC's foundational values is "Kingdom-focused ." There is not a better place to begin to fully understand this value than reading, studying, meditating, and praying through the Sermon on the Mount. Our hope is that this prayer guide will help each of us "open the eyes of our hearts" to fully comprehend and live out what it means to be a member of this kingdom and a child of God.



COMMENTARY

*Matthew*  
**5:1-12**

Tom Higgins

In Matthew 4:17 Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." After Jesus ascended the mountainside (v. 1), he began to teach his disciples how different this heavenly kingdom was from the world. The Beatitudes are Jesus' ideal for every citizen in God's kingdom. These qualities, or dispositions, are not natural tendencies for us, but as Christians each one of us is expected to possess them all. We learn what the character of a disciple of Christ ought to be. It is a character produced by the Holy Spirit just like the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-26). Jesus was not telling us that we can develop these spiritual qualities and receive these blessings as a result of our own merit. Instead, as Sinclair Ferguson noted in *The Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom Life in a Fallen World*, Jesus was describing what the power of God's kingdom makes us.

Regarding the structure of the Beatitudes. John Stott believes the first four (v. 3, 4, 5, 6) describe the Christian's relation to God, and the last four (v. 7, 8, 9, 10) seem to address the Christian's relations and duties to his fellow man. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones sees the first three Beatitudes addressing our own spiritual need and an understanding that this need will only be met by the

grace of God. The fourth, seeking "righteousness", is a great statement about the satisfaction of this spiritual need. Put another way, we can only be filled, or reborn, if we are first empty. To quote Psalm 107:9, "for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things." The next three Beatitudes are a consequence of this need being filled. Due to the Holy Spirit operating in us, we are able to become merciful, pure in heart, and serve as peacemakers. The last Beatitude is a result of becoming more like Christ; we are persecuted.

The fact that the Beatitudes are placed at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount is important. Lloyd-Jones points out the Beatitudes reveal a central truth about Christianity - the emphasis is on being rather than doing, and we can only be this way if we abide in Christ (John 15:5). More weight is on our character rather than our conduct. We are Christians first and our actions are the outcome of this - of who we are and whose we are. Of course, our conduct/obedience is critical in representing Jesus to the world, but it is only a consequence of our new self. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:10, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works..."

The blessings are the result of what happens to us as we grow spiritually and develop these dispositions. For example, only with a pure, or undivided, heart can we see Jesus for who he is. In John 14:8 Jesus tells Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." The Beatitudes begin and end with the promise, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven ." Is Jesus telling us that the most important thing in our daily lives and our destiny is membership in the kingdom of heaven? While this and the other blessings will not be fully realized until the new heaven and new earth, we can obtain a foretaste of them in the here and now. As Lloyd-Jones explains, the kingdom had come whenever Jesus was present and exercising authority. The kingdom is present now in the hearts of those who have submitted to Christ and in whom he reigns. Finally, it will come again and be fully realized when Jesus returns and rules the new heaven and new earth.

## *Prayer*

Heavenly Father, I pray for the desire to put you first in all that I do and to realize minute by minute of each day that my citizenship is in heaven. I pray that your Word becomes the rule and guide to my life, the Holy Spirit my teacher, and your glory my supreme ambition.

Guide me to sow to the Spirit in all I think and do and to understand that when I sow thoughts, I reap acts; when I sow acts, I reap habits; when I sow habits, I reap character; and when I sow the character described in your teaching from the Beatitudes, I reap a destiny. I pray that my destiny is with you. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17

## *Matthew 5:1-3*

### READ

*Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying;*

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

How awesome you are! Just your name alone reflects majesty, eternity, love, sovereignty like no other...because there is no other like you.

You came so that we, mere sinners, may have life to the fullest. Life that can only be discovered and accessed through knowing you and you alone! A life that is a gateway into your Kingdom; that promised Kingdom that offers a peace and hope that we can't even imagine.

Lord, may we embrace these beatitudes that you have spoken understanding that they reflect what you intended us to be. That 'being' which is holy and blameless because it resides in you, our Lord and Savior.

Lord, may I become poor in spirit, without any hope of finding purpose or meaning outside of knowing you. Lord, conform me to reflect this calling to be "poor" as this is our state at conception.

I love you Lord. Amen.



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18

## *Matthew 5:4-6*

### READ

*"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

To be blessed by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. To be viewed by your Son as His; that which brings life.

Lord, help us understand that in order to receive comfort we must first grieve the sin that is part of our nature. Help us to realize that meekness comes from your divine love for us who are so unworthy.

For this is where you reveal yourself. The exit ramp from the wide path onto the narrow path. Where meekness becomes a strength because we are so utterly dependent on you.

Lord, burden us with a hunger and thirst to abide in you where righteousness lives and the character you desire for us is shown.

I love you Lord. Amen.



FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19

## *Matthew 5:7-10*

### READ

*"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

What a gift it is to emulate you with our obedience! For you give us the power to reflect you, the living God, by showing your mercy, by being pure in heart, and showering peace on others.

Lord, may others be drawn, not to us, but to you because of your presence in us. May we fully abide in you without ceasing so that we can please you through loving others.

And Lord, give us the strength to stand, not conforming to this world. Keep us on that narrow path in which we're called. For we know that to follow you will bring division with the world.

I love you Lord. Amen.



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20

## *Matthew 5:11-12*

### READ

*“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Help me forget myself and seek the cross just as your Son did long ago.

Replace my desires with your desires so that I will please you in my words and actions. Help me not flee from being counterculture. For the ways and desires of this world are not of you.

May we rejoice in you when we find ourselves not being included or being heard because of you. For even the prophets and your Son were not accepted among their own.

I love you Lord. Amen.







COMMENTARY

*Matthew*  
**5:13-24**

Bob Wall

Jesus used this opportunity to provide His Disciples and the crowd with illustrations of the kind of life He expected His followers to lead. He used examples that were known as a part of everyday life for them. The first example is salt, which was of course well known to the crowd because it was a major commodity that provided their food with both spice and preservation. Sinclair B. Ferguson, in *The Sermon on the Mount*, points out that when Jesus said "You are the salt of the earth" the mood of the verb is a statement of fact! Not a command. Jesus is not urging His disciples to become something they are not; He is telling them what they are as members of the Kingdom. John R. W. Stott says in *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, "The Affirmation is straightforward: 'You are salt to the world.' This means that, when the Christian community is true to itself and the world seems to decay like rotten fish or meat around us, the church can hinder that decay in the world."

The second metaphor was light - the element that opened the night and dispelled the darkness that was all around. What is this light? Jesus clarifies our light as our good works. Sometimes this phrase "good works" becomes a pitfall for seemingly good

Christians. It is not a way to "earn" the love of God or a place in His kingdom, but these are works that we do because we have chosen to follow God and because we are servants of God. Jesus is the light of the world and He expects His light to shine through us to the world so that the world might know Him through us. Both of these metaphors focus on the type of life of service that He expects us to live. Again, Stott in a very clear statement says that we are to be true to ourselves, openly living the life Christ described in these passages and not be ashamed of Him. Then people will see us and our good works, and seeing us, will glorify God.

Jesus then discusses the Law. It was a subject that the religious leaders were using against Him. Jesus totally denies that He was trying to destroy the Law and completely refutes the claim. In no uncertain terms Jesus stated that He was the fulfillment of the Law. Christ is referring to the Old Testament law. In doing so, He repudiates the Pharisees' interpretation of the law and their view of righteousness by works. He also uses this opportunity to declare to the world just who He is and His reason for being here on earth - sent by the Father to fulfill God's promise and to provide direction and guidance on

how His followers should relate to Him and His Father, and how to live the life expected as members of the kingdom of God. Ferguson states very succinctly that “The law does three things. It expresses the character of God and His will for man’s life. Further, it teaches us the true character of man. God’s intention for man is that He live in accordance with the law of the Lord. Thirdly, the law teaches us the character of God.”

After describing how a Christian should live, Jesus warns those who teach others that they have a special responsibility not only in how they live but what they teach. He states in Matthew 5:19, that “anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the Kingdom of heaven.” Wow, this was a staggering statement! Jesus recognized that such “false prophets” and teachers through the centuries had risen up and misled others. Paul talks about them in his letters and this problem has continued through the centuries to this day. But Jesus does not leave us with only this negative to live with but follows in verse 19 with “but, whoever practices and teaches these commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” What a

wonderful reward for living the life Christ wants us to live.

Jesus warns each of us, “I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). In conclusion, Stott summarizes these passages when he writes “In the strongest possible terms He (Jesus) asserted its authority as God’s Word written, and called His disciples to accept its true and deeply exacting interpretation.”

## *Prayer*

Gracious Lord and Heavenly Father, You have stated that we are the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world .” We know that this places a tremendous responsibility on us. Help us to study and pray for Your help to understand Your plan for us. Give us the guidance we need to go out into our community to be Your ambassadors. Let us truly reflect Your light to everyone with whom we come into contact. It is with love and thanksgiving that we want to serve You. We come to You in the name of Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22

## *Matthew 5:13*

### READ

*"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

To be salt for you is an honor. As we know, the essence of salt is to make something distinctive. To heighten a flavor. To stimulate the senses.

Lord, we know the difference that one grain of salt can make. We know that we are made different by knowing you and your Son. Lord, may we, as salt, reveal your presence. Helping to preserve what is yours and the Truth that makes all that is yours different.

Lord, may our saltiness please you and not be a deterrent for others. May we abide fully in you so that we do not lose our saltiness impacting our ability to represent you.

I love you Lord. Amen.



TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23

## *Matthew 5:14-16*

### READ

*"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

You brought light on the first day of creation not by the sun and moon but by your presence. Before that was darkness.

Lord, we rejoice today in the call to be that light for you, the only source of light breaking through the darkness that engulfs this world. Your Great Commission which was given to us makes us different in our day-to-day walk.

May our efforts to abide in you be perched above so that your light penetrates in every direction. May our actions, thoughts, and words illuminate you alone so that others will recognize you, turning their hearts to the one that offers a new life!

I love you Lord. Amen.



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24

## *Matthew 5:17-18*

### READ

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Thank you for the joy of your commandments. As you remind us through this verse, may our desire to obey your commandments be driven, not so that we can become righteous, but so that we can know you.

Lord, may our lives reflect your law as a response to giving you our hearts. For it is in you alone that we become “holy and blameless” setting us apart from this world.

May we keep focused on your return so that our current redemption is fulfilled through the restoration of all that is yours.

I love you Lord. Amen.



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25

## *Matthew 5:19-20*

### READ

*“Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

It is such a privilege to be your child and to serve you. I know in my heart, that just to talk about you is not enough, as you call us to reflect you in every detail of our lives.

Help me to embrace your commandments every day for you fulfilled the law by way of the cross. Help me to take up my cross becoming selfless in how I live loving you with all my heart, soul, and mind and my neighbor as myself.

Lord, give me the grace to be holy because you are holy. For being holy is the result of an abiding relationship with you. For you alone do I seek to glorify.

I love you Lord. Amen.







COMMENTARY

*Matthew*  
**5:21-32**

Judie Ebert

"I hate her, I hate her so much! Can you believe what she posted? I'll show her - wait till she sees what I post next! I have that picture... That will show her, and she won't have any friends left!"

"Right in the middle of the Zoom call with all of the staff listening, she called me out, right there. I hate her and can never forgive her."

**MURDER** Have you said words like these or had thoughts like these in some fashion? This is what Jesus is addressing in Matthew 5:21-26. Not just the physical act of murder, but the anger that germinates in our heart. Anger breeds conflict and conflict can lead to destruction for ourselves and our relationships. Jesus says to do everything in our power to reconcile a wronged relationship. We are called to humble ourselves and seek forgiveness quickly to avoid the building resentment (James 4:10). Jesus also tells us that we cannot worship God with integrity without having a clear conscious and right relationship with our brothers and sisters (Matthew 6:14). Our attitudes towards others reflect our attitude about our relationship with God (1 John 4:20). Ephesians 4:31-32 tells us, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all

malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." It is a daily submission to the will of God.

**ADULTERY** When we look at someone with desire that we should not, we are committing adultery; if we continue to gaze, sooner or later our hands may follow. Jesus tells us that adultery is not limited to the sexual act. Jesus is blunt in scripture when it comes to adultery; sinful lust will lead you to hell. Wow! That is a bit harsh. We don't like to read things like that. Jesus also goes on to tell us to gouge out our eyes or cut off our hand to avoid lustful behaviors. What he means is to take radical action to get rid of sinful habits; stop hanging out with people you know you should not be with; move your computer to a more public place in your house; quit your job if there is someone there you are struggling with; find an accountability partner. Experiencing the pain of removing something we lust after is better than allowing the sin. Commit to honoring others in the way we look at them (1 Timothy 5:2). Jesus wants us to guard our hearts and our minds. We are to see each person as His beloved child.

**DIVORCE** Quoting from *Christ Centered Exposition, Exalting Jesus*

*in the Sermon on the Mount* by David Akin, "Divorce may be the norm in the culture, but it must never be the norm in our churches. We possess an internal power by the Holy Spirit to remain faithful and to honor our marriage vows. As repenting sinners, who daily seek our Savior's forgiveness, we gladly extend that same forgiveness to our spouses... we continually pursue reconciliation, not divorce, as we live together in marriage." Marriage is difficult; it is not a continual honeymoon. It is a vow before God and others. It is a commitment to work through the rough times. It is what God asks of us.

## *Prayer*

Dear Father God, we come before you as broken, sinful people. We are like Paul when he spoke these words, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate, I do... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out..."

(Romans 7:15-20). Father God help us to repent and grow within us a spirit to be more like you each day. Protect our minds and guard our hearts today and every day. Amen.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26

## *Matthew 5:21-22*

### READ

*"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You Fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Thank you for taking the time to speak into my life. For I know that conforming to the law through not actually committing the action does not declare my innocence.

For you alone know my thoughts and my desires. You know my guilt that was present from the time I was conceived in my mother's womb.

Lord, your judgment awaits us and may our righteous fear of you bring you honor and glory so that your love and grace will be made known to others through us.

I love you Lord. Amen.



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27

## *Matthew 5:23-24*

### READ

*"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

I stand before you in awe because of your purpose to redeem and restore me in relationship with you.

Help me Lord to strive to restore broken relationships. Help me not to confuse merely going to church as penance to seeking forgiveness and reconciliation with others.

As Samuel says in 1 Sam. 15: 22, "that obedience is better than sacrifice", may I serve you through born again relationships that you ordain in our lives.

I love you Lord. Amen.



MONDAY, MARCH 1

## *Matthew 5:25–26*

### READ

*“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

You are Lord of reconciliation. You gave us each a conscience found in our spirit that enables us to respond to your Spirit.

Lord, help us to not hesitate to make peace when afforded the opportunity. As we strive to carry out the Great Commission may we be reminded that the act of reconciling relationships is a catalyst for transformation and conforming us to your image.

May we trust more in you so that we can be courageous in giving our last bit of energy to engage others in bridging chasms that exist in our relationships.

I love you Lord. Amen.



TUESDAY, MARCH 2

## *Matthew 5:27-30*

### READ

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Thank you for your teaching as it is a reminder that you have set us apart as holy and blameless in you. We are different not just in our actions but in our hearts where motives and desires breed.

Lord, adultery is sinful because its origin is sin. As you know, adultery is not just present in marriages, but first and foremost in our relationship with you.

Like our pride, lust is a gateway to death. It leads us away from you and separates us from you subtly and indefinitely.

Prune us Lord. Gouge out those outlets in our life that steal our desires to serve you. Protect us from the temptation to doubt your indwelling Holy Spirit that makes us holy through the awful sin that infiltrates us.

I love you Lord. Amen.



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3

## *Matthew 5:31-32*

### READ

*"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

As Paul mentions in Romans 3: 23-24, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ."

For you gave us the sacrament of marriage to represent our position in Christ. For you say in Genesis 1 that a man shall leave his family to join his wife and the two may become one. Lord, thank you for this miraculous gift that captures the relationship that we were created to have with you.

Lord, purify us through you, whether divorced or not, so that our dependence on you alone will breed fruit for your Kingdom.

I love you Lord. Amen.







COMMENTARY

*Matthew*  
**5:33-48**

Dan Williams

There is a repeating theme in Jesus's sermon that goes "you have heard it said..., but I say." Is Jesus changing the rules here, or is he going somewhere else? But on further inspection He is challenging what we could call the Zeitgeist of his time, such as swearing oaths by something over which you have no control or getting even when someone does something bad to you. And love your enemies!?! Give them your clothes? Let them clobber you? Are you kidding me? Even the Roman soldier who considers you lower than a dog and treats you accordingly? Carry his pack further than required?

The battle we are witnessing is the Zeitgeist (the spirit of the times as translated from the German) versus the Holy Spirit (along with Jesus and the Father). That same spirit is still with us. The overall theme in all of Jesus's teaching is to put the other person ahead of yourself. God is generous to all of us, the good and the bad. We are to mirror Him and to refrain from self-serving behavior which does not reflect our Creator. To borrow an example from Eugene Peterson's *The Message* paraphrase of this passage, how many times do we see people "virtue signal" by saying things like "I'll pray for you" but not following up with doing it later. In fact, verse 33 is stated "And

don't say anything you don't mean." You admittedly may have good intentions, but we all know what kind of paving material that makes and where it ultimately leads. Jesus' point is to have integrity. Be true to yourselves in word, thought and deed. But more than that: be true to God by reflecting his image in word, thought and deed.

Jesus challenges conventional thinking and tells people to "be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Sounds like a tall order and one impossible to achieve. Be perfect like God? William Barclay in his Daily Study Bible says that the Greek word used here for "perfect" is "teleios" meaning fulfilling the purpose for which you were created. What is our purpose? Pardon us for going full Presbyterian on you but "Man's chief end (purpose) is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." Sound familiar? (Hint: Westminster Shorter Catechism). We glorify God by treating others in the manner Jesus is describing, e.g., loving our enemies and treating them with respect, even those of the opposite political party. You will be "teleios."

# *Prayer*

Loving Father, let the words of Jesus sink deep into our hearts as we seek the Spirit's guidance in our everyday interactions. Let us view others as Jesus teaches, loving them whether they return the love or not, and live out our purpose for which we were created. In Your precious Name, Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 4

## *Matthew 5:33–35*

### READ

*“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ But I tell you, do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool: or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

You know us so thoroughly yet still love us more than we can imagine. In this truth, I say “Amen!”

Lord, show us to be yours through the simple commandment of keeping our oaths. Lord, you are the great promise fulfiller, the great truth revealer.

For these verses reminds us that we own nothing Lord that you already don’t claim as yours. Humble us Lord so that we remember that all we see and know are from you. For your purposes alone and not ours.

I love you Lord. Amen.



FRIDAY, MARCH 5

## *Matthew 5:36-37*

### READ

*"And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' be 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

May we glorify you through the simple process of saying 'yes' or 'no' without edifying it through our greed.

Help us model the childlike practice of using 'yes' and 'no' with confidence that you will bring Truth through these responses.

Protect us Lord from the evil one and the deceptive ways used to steer us away from your Light!

I love you Lord. Amen.



SATURDAY, MARCH 6

## *Matthew 5:38-42*

### READ

*"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

It is your awesome love that sets the tone for how we are to be. From the cross, you said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34) modeling how we are to respond to oppression and persecution.

Lord, you know our tendency to always place our rights first. You know that to follow you we must be dead to our "self ." We must be born again abiding in you.

It is then that we can go that extra mile, turn the other cheek, give away our tunic leaving them questioning why we are different. Lord, use us to open the eyes and hearts of those that don't know You.

I love you Lord. Amen.



MONDAY, MARCH 8

## *Matthew 5:43-45*

### READ

*"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Thank you for your grace which touches everyone and everything in your creation.

Conform me to your image so that I may be unconditional in my love. For anyone can love their neighbor, Lord, but only you empower us to love our enemies.

Lord, this is where we show the world that we are different. That we are recognized as your children.

I love you Lord. Amen.



TUESDAY, MARCH 9

## *Matthew 5:16-18*

### READ

*"If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Thank you for your great Spirit that separates us and makes us Holy. For you called us to be a light to the world but not to be of the world (John 15: 19).

It is through the process of being born again in you that allows us to think, speak, and act differently. To love those who don't love us. To befriend and invest in those that may not appreciate us.

Your calling is to be perfect, not try to be perfect. Only through you is this possible. May your indwelling Holy Spirit enable me.

I love you Lord. Amen.







COMMENTARY

*Matthew*  
**6:1-18**

Theo Park

How many times have you wanted to be noticed when you've done something noteworthy?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus seems to be teaching a whole lot about relationships and in Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus explains to us how to practice our righteousness before men, as He applies faith principles to three areas of our living; first, in giving of alms; second, in praying; third, in fasting. The emphasis is on our relationship with our Father.

We might begin by noticing in verse 1 that Jesus says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them" (We should state that we do have righteousness which is from Christ Himself, but that is another whole matter to be explored at another time). As we live out our lives, our living should occur in certain ways and in Jesus' teaching here He emphasizes that our living will occur in front of others. Further, others will see us living out our lives. The warning is to "Beware" of a show.

So, in the giving of alms (or in other words, giving of your time, talents, and money), as iterated in verses 2-4, Jesus says that giving to the needy, which he did not define, was to occur without fanfare; without

drawing attention to oneself. Notice in verse 3 the left hand is not to know what the right hand is doing, "...so that your giving may be in secret" (v 4). The first principle is to be secret givers.

Second, Jesus' principle for praying is to be done without fanfare and without repetition. In fact, He says to "...go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen."; and "when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans..." (v 6,7) Our Father sees in secret and knows what we need before we ask Him. The second principle is to be secret prayers, exercising faith.

Now we have an inserted prayer which is a pattern for our praying and a pattern for our practicing our righteousness before men. In teaching us how to pray, Jesus opens up for us the intimate relationship we can have with God, who is our Father. First, we are to address Him as Father, acknowledge His reign in Heaven and praise Him for who He is. We are to ask for His reign to occur on Earth as it exists in Heaven. For our personal wellbeing, we are to ask for daily bread, whether it be literal or spiritual or whatever is needed for our daily walk with Him. Integral to our relationship with our Father, we are to seek forgiveness for our debts

(trespasses, sins). For our personal relationships with others, we are to forgive our debtors. Forgiveness of others and the consequences (v 14-15) is the only portion of this teaching Jesus elaborated upon. Spiritually, we are to ask not to be led into temptation but delivered from evil. As we live our lives through this prayer, our relationship with our Father and others will be transparent, open, and transformative.

Third, in verse 17, the emphasis is to treat yourself as you would normally do in an ordinary day. When fasting, let your appearance be between yourself and the Father. He will see. The third principle is to exercise faith in fasting between yourself and the Father.

As we live our lives, we are to live in such a way so as not to draw attention to ourselves. We are to give in secret, pray in secret, fast in secret. Our Father who sees in secret will reward us—this is our faith. This is to be our relationship with Him. This is how we are to practice our righteousness before men, openly in secret.

## *Prayer*

Father, we thank you for teaching us how to live with you. Help us to be faithful in trusting you as we live out our lives day by day. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10

## *Matthew 6:1-4*

### READ

*“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

You know me so well yet your love for me has no end. You know that I struggle every day wanting to benefit myself. Even in my ‘acts of righteousness’ I seek sinful pleasure of others knowing the good that ‘I’ have done.

Lord, separate me from this world by giving me the desire and the ability to serve you without recognition. Let my ‘faith’ alone please you allowing my ‘serving’ and ‘giving’ to be a reflection of you and not me.

Lord, keep me from ever becoming that person that has already received their reward in your eyes.

I love you Lord. Amen.



THURSDAY, MARCH 11

## *Matthew 6:5-8*

### READ

*“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

What a joy to know that you seek one-on-one time with us especially when we pray. Not wanting interruptions but our full attention. For you love us Lord and I praise you for this!

At the same time, Lord, you know my sinfulness. For even my prayers can be misleading wanting myself to be the center of attention. Lord, protect me from myself for the evil one is at work on me even in my prayer life.

Lord, may I take refuge today in you alone. Making time alone with you for you.

I love you Lord. Amen.



FRIDAY, MARCH 12

## *Matthew 6:9-13*

### READ

*"This, then, is how you should pray:*

*'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in  
heaven.*

*Give us today our daily bread.*

*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our  
debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the  
evil one."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Thank you for the instructions on prayer for I find it easier to talk to others than talking to you. Not because I don't want to talk to you but because I don't know what to say.

Lord, grow my dependence on prayer. Give me a prayer life that is never ceasing reflecting the posture of my heart for you.

Lord, mold and shape me through a prayer life that allows me to see clearly my despair. A prayer life that intertwines me with the greater Body of Christ, your church.

May the Lord's Prayer indwell in my spirit leading my thoughts and words as I commune with you.

I love you Lord. Amen.



SATURDAY, MARCH 13

## *Matthew 6:14-15*

### READ

*“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Thank you for these instructions for it is easy to forget your call for us to forgive others. I know that I don't receive forgiveness because I forgive others but because I cast myself on your mercy which excludes no one.

Lord, protect me from being that person praying “forgive us our debts” and yet not extending forgiveness to other's debts. Lord, give me a heart of gratitude so that I may forgive and love more.

Lord, let your gift of forgiveness be a gateway for others to know you, the almighty and merciful Father.

I love you Lord. Amen.



MONDAY, MARCH 15

## *Matthew 6:16–18*

### READ

*“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

You are the great redeemer. You know that hypocrisy consumes every inch of my body. Even when I seek to commune with you, like through fasting, I find that I get distracted looking for edification through a means other than you.

Lord, please forgive me for my shortcomings. Conform me in your image so that I may be consumed by pleasing you alone. From Hebrews 11: 6, we know that it is impossible to please you without faith. Grant me that faith, Lord.

I love you. Amen.







COMMENTARY

*Matthew*  
**6:19-34**

Jim Ford

These verses really hit home for me as money and worry are two topics that are extremely important for all of us. More times than not, they actually go hand-in-hand. I think that Jesus is warning us to be careful where we put our confidence. Having spent many years on Stewardship Committees, verse 21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also", has always been a pivotal verse to remind folks that money is not everything and certainly not more important than Jesus. Our desire and love of money can be the start of a downward spiral. Storing up treasures in Heaven is not limited to tithing but is also about all acts of obedience to God. Yes, tithing is important, but we need to be a cheerful giver and to have an attitude of gratitude to seek the fulfillment of God's purpose in all we do, not just about where we give or how we spend our money. Money is just a part of it and when you think about it, everything that we have actually belongs to the Lord. Living a life where God is our Master takes obedience, prayer, and sacrifice, but the blessings and joys are abundant.

We all want to see clearly what God wants us to do, and I know that I personally would love to see a neon sign, but our vision can get cloudy and blurred if we allow our own self-

serving desires to take precedence. I found that I see that neon sign from God much better when I stay in His Word and have that servant's heart and gratitude.

Worrying has been a lifelong battle of mine and I think it started with my Dad dying so young by suicide and seeing my Mom raise two boys on a shoe-string budget. A big night out for my brother and me was going to Burger King for dinner. However, my mom's faith was instrumental in giving her the hope and perseverance even after losing her husband and having the responsibility of raising two boys on her own.

Verse 27 is powerful and humbling as it asks, "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" Think about that. What is the positive impact of worrying? I cannot find any and in fact, it can cause health issues, relationship problems, disrupt productivity, and even impact how we treat ourselves and others. Worrying can cause paralysis by analysis and a deep depressive state of mind.

God needs to be our first turn, as it says in verse 33 and 34, – "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry

about tomorrow. For tomorrow will worry about itself." Worrying does not take away tomorrow's troubles, it takes away today's peace. We are all busy and life moves fast. It is easy in the busyness of our daily life for God to get bumped out of first place. We must actively choose God first and choose to give Him first place in every area of our life.

## *Prayer*

Lord, you are the one true God. The way, the truth and the life. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords. I thank you for your grace and all our blessings and daily provisions. Everything that we have comes from you...

everything. We are just stewards of your treasures. I pray for the courage, strength, and obedience to put you first in every aspect of my life. To be a cheerful giver, to be a light in my community, and to serve you as my one and only Master.

Give me a clear vision to show me your will for my life and give me peace and joy knowing that you are sovereign, almighty and will be victorious. Take away the worry and replace it with the hope of Jesus Christ. I love you Father. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 16

## *Matthew 6:19–21*

### READ

*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

I am trapped in a circle. The more I gather possessions in order to feel secure, the more I feel I need them to be secure leading me to guard them more to maintain this security. Then becoming less secure.

Lord, real security does not come from gathering wealth or possessions but from being delivered from loving it.

Lord, transform my thinking to dwell and desire on your eternal home that is ahead of me. Posture my heart in such a way that I live knowing that this is not my home so that I strive to accumulate for a time to come when all is restored through you.

I love you Lord. Amen.



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17

## *Matthew 6:22-24*

### READ

*"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

You are the Lord of Light. May your Light be my guide and may it illuminate my heart. Give me eyes that are fixated on your Light and not the darkness that surrounds me.

As Isaiah 28: 28 says, "Grain must be ground to make bread", Lord, grind me so that your desires replace my own. Spare me from exerting all my energy to staying on the fence keeping one foot in my desires and the other in your desires.

For you call us through the narrow gate which is Jesus. One cannot serve you and mammon. There is only one King in your Kingdom, Lord. Let your Lordship crush in me all that is not of you.

I love you Lord. Amen.



THURSDAY, MARCH 18

## *Matthew 6:25-27*

### READ

*"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

May I rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is your will in Christ Jesus (1 Thess. 5: 16-18). Lord, this is the answer to the lifelong problem and idol that I have called anxiety.

I let it consume me because I am not fixated on you. I allow materialism to seep into my life obstructing my focus on you being my master, and then I worry about it so much that I forget you. What a cycle that has trapped me.

For I long to be like the birds of the air. For they are not creatures of idleness, for they would be overcome if not for their discipline to hard work and daily grind. But they live free from worry Lord. For they carry out your purpose. Lord, grant me that ability by renewing my mind and heart.

I love you Lord. Amen.



FRIDAY, MARCH 19

## *Matthew 6:28–30*

### READ

*“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

You have gifted us with the ability to abide in you. Even so, worry creeps in sometimes paralyzing my thoughts. However, you bring accountability through faith to turn back to you. For true freedom is found in Christ alone, not outside of Christ. As Galatians 2:20 reminds us that Christ lives in us and not beside us.

Lord, give me the ability to recognize worry. Though it is natural for me to worry, it is still a sin and it does separate me from you.

Lord, strengthen my trust in you Lord, for this is another eternal gift that I must be dependent upon. For without trust in you as my foundation, worry will weaken my faith causing it to crumble leaving me conquered.

I love you Lord. Amen.



SATURDAY, MARCH 20

## *Matthew 6:31-34*

### READ

*“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

For you do not offer freedom from worry. You offer a new life that includes freedom from worry and I praise you for this.

Lord, your indwelling Holy Spirit sets me apart as different in this world. For I am different from others because of you.

For I seek your righteousness first in the morning when I wake up and last at night when I fall to sleep. For I have been crucified with you, for I no longer live but Christ lives in me giving me freedom from worry so I can be consumed by your purposes. Lord, may my life be a magnet for you; reflecting a life free from the tyranny of worry.

I love you Lord. Amen.







COMMENTARY

*Matthew*  
**7:1-20**

Alice McSwain

I have been reading, praying and contemplating over the verses of Matthew 7:1-20. It has been difficult to narrow down which life changing scripture to share with you. These verses are jam packed with volumes of potential sermons and monthly bible studies.

My first reading through chapter 7 brought recollections of past Sunday School lessons and wise words spoken to me from loved ones and mentors. Verse 1: Do not judge others. Verses 7 and 8: Want an answer to prayer? Then persistently ask, seek and knock. The ending of verse 11: Your Heavenly Father knows what is best and what you truly need. Verse 12: The Golden Rule- Do to others what you would like done to you. Verses 13-14: The road towards heaven is narrow and the road to destruction is wide. Many travel the easy road, but the difficult road...few ever find it. Verses 15-20: Beware of others that disguise themselves as sheep but are really wolves. You can identify the good and bad in people by their actions. And these are just what I have paraphrased from the initial reading.

After coming back to the scriptures, a day later, their meaning stirred deeper thoughts. I am in awe how the words are pure truth, as relevant

and effective today as the moment Jesus spoke them. Life's rules, so simple and taught to many of us at an early age. Yet, so easy to forget/ignore when we go through difficulties or feel wronged. Adulthood is clouded with responsibilities and self-confidence makes it difficult to relinquish control. How many times have I let these basic lessons slip my mind? How many times have I failed to let God guide and control?

It is true that the road to destruction is wide and easy to walk on. And that narrow road...Oh My, it is difficult! How tired I get when trials build my character! It's hard suppressing natural instincts and changing mind-sets to put others first and trying to live a life that pleases God. It takes much practice, and many situations are mishandled until we finally just let go and let God take control. He is the only one that can help; you cannot walk a life of faith all by yourself. Thanks be to heaven, He sent us the Holy Spirit whispering inside, His living written Word and Jesus's actions and examples to help us every hour of our day. Life is tough, but with God, ALL Things are Possible. Can you put into words that moment when God reveals his presence in a situation? I am grateful to be part of a congregation of Jesus Followers. When we unite in same

mind and motive with God at the lead, mighty things will happen, far greater and more wonderful than we could have ever imagined than if we tried to accomplish them ourselves.

## *Prayer*

Precious Lord, thank you for gifting us opportunity to build a physical place of our own, the freedom to worship, study your Word and share with the community your gift of eternal life. Reveal to us what we truly need. May your Spirit guide us in decisions that bring glory and honor to you. Use the talents you gave us in welcoming all people under your roof for generations to come. When we stray from your plan, quickly correct us. Plant your scriptures in our hearts; help the words from our mouths further your kingdom. Let your love and light radiate in everything we do. Your truth will show us the way, for you are our God and Savior. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 22

## *Matthew 7:1-2*

### READ

*“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

You are the great judge, the foundation for justice and we submit to you Lord.

Lord, let me please you by not succumbing to a critical spirit. That person that is constantly condemning and feeling superior to those who surround us.

May I be confident in knowing you alone. Not in seeing myself as someone with an advantage over others because I have been calling your name for all my life, but because you called me in my despair. Keep me humbly abiding in You.

I love you Lord. Amen.



TUESDAY, MARCH 23

## *Matthew 7:3-5*

### READ

*“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Give me eyes to see and ears to hear my shortcomings and the ability to be still so that you can overcome them. In victory, help me not boast so that you may be glorified!

You say through your servant, Solomon, that the “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov. 9: 10). Lord, burden me with this fear so that I may be light and salt for you alone.

For I know that I am incapable of judging because of the plank that blurs my ability to discern. So relieve me, Lord, from seeking the dust in my brother’s eye. Let me be a beacon for you.

I love you Lord. Amen.



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24

## Matthew 7:6

### READ

*“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Thank you for this verse as it is a precise reminder of who I am without you. For you know our sinful nature, that without your intervention, we'll soon forget you and turn back to our old ways.

At the same time, Lord, help me discern that in your call to us to be “fishers of men”, to be discerning on which bait to use. For we are of ignorant mind and will abandon truth when tempted by what looks good to our eyes.

May we be grounded like John the Baptist when he said, “He must become greater, I must become less” and just simply point to Jesus.

I love you Lord. Amen.



THURSDAY, MARCH 25

## *Matthew 7:7–8*

### READ

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

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Thank you so much for not answering every prayer that I have sent you, for who knows how many times I would have been married if you were to have answered to my satisfaction.

Lord, even though I jest, I am completely aware that this is a recurring theme from your Son throughout the Gospels. For how can we be separated from the source that we abide?

Lord, thank you for your presence and the knowledge that I am a wretched person; knowing that you are the answer to all my problems and the endless hope that you give. Lord, help me to ask, seek, and knock without ceasing so that your glory may be revealed.

I love you Lord. Amen.



FRIDAY, MARCH 26

## *Matthew 7:9-12*

### READ

*“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

I thank you for not just being God, but being our Father. For this separates us as your children.

Lord, it is easy for me to fall in love with the God that I want, but I ask that you break through this barrier so that I come to know and love the God that you are. One that loves us more than we can imagine.

So much so that we seek to not just praise this Sermon on the Mount, but to practice it....to live it....to reflect it. Ultimately, pleasing you with our faith and love for you so that your Golden Rule is our response to you!

I love you Lord. Amen.



SATURDAY, MARCH 27

## *Matthew 7:13-14*

### READ

*“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Thank you for revealing your Truth. For revealing to us that your Son, Jesus Christ is the narrow gate to life with you.

As a son of Adam, I realize that I am born on the wide path. A path that is not set apart and not leading to that narrow gate, Jesus Christ. It is a path of destruction and we must choose to step off this path. To part with the world to which we belong.

Thank you for including me in the ‘few’ that know you as Father and his son, as Messiah.

I love you Lord. Amen.



MONDAY, MARCH 29

## *Matthew 7:15-20*

### READ

*“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

You created us to know you and follow you. However, our sinful nature deceives us and turns us away to that forbidden fruit that catches our eyes.

Lord, we know about that false prophet who may teach and boast about your ways, but not about you. That will even talk about loving others and serving others, but not about loving and serving through you. Or even emphasize discipleship without emphasizing sacrifice that your Son laid down his life for us so that we would do the same for others.

For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5: 22-23). May we bear this fruit for you.

I love you Lord. Amen.







COMMENTARY

*Matthew*  
**7:21-29**

Bill Garvin

The concluding exhortations of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount emphasize the importance of abiding in Christ. The accompaniment of Jesus to enter the kingdom of heaven awaits "only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." A relationship with Jesus is not just a suggestion, but a necessary key to entry into heaven as a part of the family of God. Jesus makes this plain when he tells us in verses 22-23 that our destiny will not depend on our knowledge and use of his name ("I never knew you"), but on our knowledge of him personally. Our relationship with Christ will be the issue.

The family of God is the often seen as "our" church where we live together through knowing, loving, caring for, forgiving, and teaching each other. In Matthew 12:50 Jesus clarifies his family as "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." The Holy Spirit has been given so that we may live this life Jesus describes.

Just as Hosea (Hosea 8:2) reminded Israel that acknowledging God is not the same as living the covenant with God, we have reminders throughout the New Testament of actions we can take. James 1:22 puts it quite simply "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do

what it says." Paul reiterates this truth in Romans 2:13: "For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous." Our instructions are clear: living, doing, obeying what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus expected us to obey these teachings.

The lost opportunity to be with Jesus in the kingdom of heaven is a horrifying consequence for not abiding in Christ. Hearing the words Jesus shared and not putting them into practice leads to a preventable loss. The foolish man who built his house on sand suffered as his house fell with a great crash. We can avoid this loss and enjoy a loving family relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. As we strive to build a church building, let us be like the wise man who built his house on the rock, the rock of Jesus. "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Verses 28-29 of Matthew 7 describe the response to the teaching of Jesus: "the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." Studying the conclusion of the Sermon on the

Mount we too can take comfort in being welcomed into the kingdom of heaven by living, doing, and obeying the will of the Father through the Holy Spirit.

## *Prayer*

Heavenly Father, thank you for sharing your warnings of how easily we can take your knowing us for granted. Help us to listen to you daily and let your Spirit lead us to carry out your will in service to others. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 30

## *Matthew 7:21*

### READ

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

May I worship the Lord who is, and not the Lord I want. For this is my struggle.

Intercede for me Lord, so that I may do your will. For the good that I want to do, that is not what I do. For your words are clear, that we cannot just say with our mouths that you are Lord, we must confess with our hearts and be born again.

I love you Lord. Amen.



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31

## *Matthew 7:22-23*

### READ

*"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

I do not want to be part of the many that will profess 'Lord, Lord'. I want to be the few that know you with all of my heart. That long for you throughout the day and abide in your presence without ceasing.

Give me this heart Lord. Let me walk in confidence, knowing you, pleasing you, hearing you say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant' (Matthew 25: 21 & 23).

Replace my desires with your desires Lord. For I love you. Amen.



THURSDAY, APRIL 1

## *Matthew 7:24-25*

### READ

*"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Thank you for being in my life. For being my anchor and foundation. For this determines who is wise in your eyes.

Lord, I know that a relationship with you is what defines you being a foundation for my life (house). Let my relationship (foundation) with you withstand the hardships that we encounter in my day-to-day life so that others may be drawn to the source of security and eternal life.

I love you Lord. Amen.



FRIDAY, APRIL 2

## *Matthew 7:26-27*

### READ

*“But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

Give us a heart of obedience so that our house (life) reflects your sovereignty and glory. For you Lord, are our Rock and Salvation.

Lord, help me be different. Not because I go to church, tithe, and call you Lord, but because I love you and long to please you. For you are our Father, full of love and mercy through rainstorms and high winds.

I love you Lord. Amen.



SATURDAY, APRIL 3

## *Matthew 7:28-29*

### READ

*When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*

### PRAY

Wonderful Father,

We know that you gave us the Sermon on the Mount not that we could admire it, but to help us recognize your Kingdom.

May we reflect the obedience and life that you call us to so that your authority as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords will be reflected to others.

As you taught us to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

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

For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and glory forever. Amen.



