



Living the Sermon on the Mount

Putting His Teaching Into Practice

Nathan Guy, editor



“Living the Sermon on the Mount: Putting His Teaching Into Practice”

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LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Main Sources & Conversation Partners

Three Main Books:

Randy Harris, *Living Jesus: Doing What Jesus Says in the Sermon on the Mount* (Leafwood, 2012).

Ed Gallagher, *The Sermon on the Mount: Explorations in Christian Practice* (Heritage Christian University Press, 2021).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Touchstone, 1995).

Background Helps for Reading/Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount:

Read: Nathan Guy, “Word To The Wise,” blogpost series on healthytheology.com:
<https://healthytheology.com/word-to-the-wise/>

Listen: Tim Keller’s Series on the Sermon on the Mount (audio):
<http://www.allsoulsmissoula.org/som>

Watch: Dallas Willard’s Divine Conspiracy series of videos:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezbExj7pT1s&list=PLEEFE7764C0CD74B&ab_channel=DanielVieira



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Class Outline & Reading Options

Week 1: Called to Discipleship (August 20)

Harris 9-14, 133-148	Gallagher 3-24	Bonhoeffer 41-102
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Week 2: Your Blessed Life Now (August 27)

Harris 27-38	Gallagher 25-38	Bonhoeffer 105-115
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Week 3: Reign or Shine (September 3)

Harris 39-48	Gallagher 39-50	Bonhoeffer 115-120
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Week 4: Calling All Neurotics: Life, Love & the Law (September 10)

Harris 49-60	Gallagher 51-64	Bonhoeffer 120-126
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Week 5: The Antidote to Anger (September 17)

Harris 61-70	Gallagher 65-76	Bonhoeffer 126-131
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Week 6: Wanderlust (September 24)

Harris 71-82	Gallagher 65-72, 76-77	Bonhoeffer 131-135
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Week 7: To Tell the Truth (October 1)

Harris 83-92	Gallagher 65-72, 77-78	Bonhoeffer 135-140
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Week 8: A Perfect Love (October 8)

Harris 93-106	Gallagher 65-72, 78-92	Bonhoeffer 140-154
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Week 9: Our God Who Sees in Secret (October 15)

Harris 107-116	Gallagher 129-170	Bonhoeffer 155-172
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Week 10: When You Haven't Got a Prayer (October 22)

Harris 117-128	Gallagher 171-188	Bonhoeffer 173-181
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Week 11: Judgy McJudgerson (October 29)

Harris 129-138	Gallagher 189-206	Bonhoeffer 182-188
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Week 12: Who Do You Trust? (November 5)

Harris 139-146	Gallagher 207-220	Bonhoeffer 189-195
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Week 13: Practice Makes Perfect (November 12)

Harris 15-26	Gallagher 221-238	Bonhoeffer 196-197
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LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 0: Background Helps for the Teacher

The information here is intended to help the teacher orient themselves to the idea behind this class. If anything is especially interesting/valuable, feel free to include it in Week 1 for your class. A good class introduction could easily take up 2 or 3 weeks.

Why didn't I plan it that way, then? Well, because it's important to jump right into the text as quickly as possible. The purpose of this class is to actually **practice** the Sermon on the Mount. So, I encourage you to only spend 1 week doing a background or set-up for the class. Consider this background section a way to help you, the teacher, jump start your excitement and provide direction for the class.

Key Questions You May Wonder About

1) Why is the Sermon on the Mount so important?

Nathan Guy, "The Complete Art of Happiness."

<https://healthytheology.com/complete-art-of-happiness-sermon-mountain-1/>

2) How Should We Read This Sermon? Does Jesus mean for us to take the Sermon seriously?

Nathan Guy, "The Devil's Masterpiece." <https://healthytheology.com/devils-masterpiece-sermon-mountain-8/>

Chapter 1 of Randy Harris' *Living Jesus* (pp. 15-26). (You'll notice Chapter 1 covers the END of the Sermon on the Mount. I have moved his chapter 1 to the END of the class. But it is a helpful introduction as well.

3) How do I teach this class in a way that actually leads us to practice the Sermon on the Mount?

Randy Harris' interview on the Life on the West Side Podcast episode 10:
"Transformational: Putting Our Teaching Into Practice."

<https://nathanguy.buzzsprout.com/1581760/8136410-transformational-putting-our-teaching-into-practice-w-randy-harris-episode-10>

There are three books I am using in my class—any one of which could serve as your “lesson plan” from week to week. Due to ease of use, I recommend using Randy Harris' book as your main guide. But I will order any of these books that you wish.

Randy Harris, *Living Jesus*

Ed Gallagher, *The Sermon on the Mount*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

You may want to encourage your class to pick a book and do some reading ahead of time each week to contribute to the class (if you so choose). The church will purchase whatever books you need.



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 1: Called to Discipleship

Object of the Class: To help everyone realize that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount calls us to be disciples—people who put his teaching into practice. Therefore, we want to form a covenant group that agrees to live by the words of Jesus.

Suggested Outline for Class:

1) Opening Questions (5-10 minutes)

Choose a section of the Sermon on the Mount and have different people read it—in different versions. Ask them “suppose this was the first time you ever heard those words. How does it strike you?”

Show reasons Christians have a hard time deciding what to do with this sermon:

Do you think Jesus means for us to actually do that?

Reason to be suspicious: how can we “be perfect” (Matt 5:48)?

Does he mean it literally?

Reason to be suspicious: “do not resist an evil person” (Matt 5:39).

What would it take (in your own life) to become the kind of person this sermon describes?

2) How Christians Have Interpreted the Sermon (5 minutes)

Summarize Randy Harris, *Living Jesus*, pp. 9-14

3) The Challenge (5 minutes)

We argue about whether to take it *literally*, when the key question is whether we will take it **seriously**. However we interpret parts of the Sermon (acknowledging some may be literal, some may be figurative, some may be metaphorical), there is

no doubt that Jesus intends for us to take it seriously. To become this kind of person.

Read Matthew 7:21-27. Notice that Jesus says “whoever hears these sayings of mine and *puts them into practice...*”

Read Matthew 28:18-20, where Jesus tells those same disciples to go and make disciples, “teaching them to *obey everything I commanded you*”...including the sermon on the mount!

4) Show the Randy Harris Video introducing the point: we are called to put this into practice (video is 15 minutes)

Show Video: Randy Harris, Living Jesus lesson 1

<https://www.facebook.com/chesmont.org/videos/randy-harris-living-jesus-1/283112218968797/>

5) Are we willing to put the Sermon into practice, and hold each other accountable? (5-10 minutes)

Summarize Randy Harris’ section entitled “Living the Sermon” (pp.133-148). Randy discusses forming a “Covenant Group” that agrees to live by the sermon week to week. Ask the class to consider making a covenant pledge (either as a class or with a class member) to put these things into practice each week.

Randy offers simple suggestions at the end of each of his lessons. I will reproduce them in these notes. You are welcome to modify them to fit your class.

Other suggested approaches: <https://renovare.org/articles/practicing-the-sermon-on-the-mount>

You will end each lesson giving these goals for the week, and begin each class asking how the class did in putting those goals into practice.

The goal is to make sure it is *voluntary* and *practical*.

Questions from Book Readings associated with Week 1

Questions from Harris (pp. 9-14, 133-148)

Have we committed to seriously live out the Sermon on the Mount?

Are we willing to create or join a covenant community?

What are the rules/practices of our covenant community?

Questions from Gallagher (3-24)

What does Matthew's Gospel say about the "kingdom of heaven?"

What do Jesus' disciples think they are getting themselves into by following him?

How does the Sermon on the Mount relate to the overall mission of Jesus?

Questions from Bonhoeffer (41-102)

What is "cheap grace" and what is "costly grace"?

What does discipleship require?

Is this a burden or a blessing for the Christian? Why?

Other Suggested Helps for Week 1 for Teachers or for your Class

Video

Francis Chan, The Cost of Discipleship

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUEHZCxjq-o&ab_channel=PreacherTalks

Randy Harris, Living Jesus lesson 1

<https://www.facebook.com/chesmont.org/videos/randy-harris-living-jesus-1/283112218968797/>

Audio/Podcast

Tim Keller, “The Call to Discipleship.”

https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/timothy-keller/the-call-to-discipleship-7YcW5CFr_xM/

Tim Keller, “Upside Down Living.”

https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/timothy-keller/upside-down-living-tfuzCySj_5d/

Further Reading

C. S. Lewis, “Is Christianity Hard or Easy?” in *Mere Christianity*, Book 4, Chapter 8.

<https://www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/documents/apologetics/mere-christianity/Book4/cs-lewis-mere-christianity-book4.php>

Nathan Guy, “The Cost of Apprenticeship.” <https://healthytheology.com/cost-apprenticeship-sermon-mount-5/>

Nathan Guy, “11 Helps in Reading the Sermon on the Mount.”

<https://healthytheology.com/helps-reading-sermon-mount-15/>



Week 2: Your Blessed Life Now

Object of the Class: To hear the Beatitudes as a gracious invitation to (1) accept God’s assurance to all of us, even to the least of these, but also (2) to see these as character traits worth aspiring to in the Kingdom of God. In other words, these are promises to accept (giving us hope), but also challenges to grow into (giving us a calling).

Suggested Outline for Class:

1) Comparing Accounts (5-10 minutes)

Have one person read Matthew 4:23-5:12. Then have another person read Luke 6:17-26. (Some people think these are two different sermons; others think it’s the same sermon told in two different ways). Ask people to notice differences between these two accounts.

Ex: “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matt) vs. “Blessed are the poor” (Luke)

Ex: “Blessed...hunger...for righteousness” (Matt) vs. “hunger” (Luke)

Explain the main context differences:

MATTHEW	LUKE
Sermon on the MOUNT	Sermon on the PLAIN
Focuses on inner attitude/spiritual side	Focuses on economic/physical side
Emphasizes blessing/hope for have-not	Includes “woes” for those who have
Longer account (3 chapters)	Shorter account (1 chapter)

But putting these two together, we find some similarities and overall truths:

-Both begin with grace: Jesus preaches good news, then heals all diseases, before he offers any challenge. (Jesus acts first, and acts in love first, before he asks anything of us!)

- There is concern for the whole person—inward and outward. He cares about your spiritual needs and your economic/physical needs. And these are related.
- It is possible to hear both hope and summons—blessing and challenge—in these words.

2) Hearing Words of Hope: Blessed Are the Nobodies! (15 minutes)

Question: What do you hear when you hear Jesus say the word “blessed”? Is it hard to imagine someone who is poor, or someone who is mourning, or someone who is being persecuted as a “blessed” person?

What does the world seem to value? (Money, power, fame, might...)
 Who does the world not seem to value? (This list!)

Summarize Randy Harris chapter (pp.27-38). Some key takeaways:

- One important reading is to see the beatitudes as “promises to accept, not commands to be obeyed” (not a quote from Randy, but same idea).
- Jesus blesses the ‘*anawim*’ which are the “nobodies” or the last to get picked for any team. The people nobody wants. The lowest of the low. And since the “top tier” are always a minority, most people in the world, most of the time, are the “have nots.”
- Read each beatitude in terms of how it describes the “loser” side, the ones who don’t usually get the goal or the prize. And read the promise at the end of each as describing a promise from God that these are the winners in the kingdom of God.
- This is an “upside down” kingdom; Jesus picks the riff-raff, blesses them, promises them hope, and empowers them.
- Discuss your own “*anawim*” moments and have others share. Talk about how good it feels to know that the have-nots are blessed, and welcome in the kingdom of God.

3) Hearing the Words of Summons/Calling/Challenge: Choosing This Life (15 minutes)

Randy Harris offers one helpful way to see the Beatitudes (a view shared by Dallas Willard): promises received not commands obeyed. But another approach—one that I take—is to see this list as describing the way of wisdom – the kind of life that Christians are called to seek after...the life that Christ lived. Discuss this approach. Here are some helps:

Read Psalm 1. “Blessed” doesn’t mean “you poor thing, you don’t have what it takes but God is gracious to you” here. It means “following the way of wisdom and having a flourishing life as a result.”

Consider Luke’s list of “woes.” Does that suggest there are certain lifestyles we are called to avoid (seeking to get our fill while others go hungry, or making sure we are satisfied while others are starving)?

It could be that Jesus is saying “when the value system of the kingdom of the world is so wrong, here is the value system that describes the Kingdom of God.”

Read the list in Matthew 5:3-12 in order, and consider this path to choosing wisdom:

- 1) Poor (in Spirit). We can either be attached to the things of this world or detached from the things of this world (which might explain why “poor in spirit” and “poor” are not that different in the ancient world). If we say no to the kingdoms of the world, we probably will not “win” money, fame, or power in this world. We don’t seek the kingdoms of the world, for ours is the kingdom of heaven.
- 2) Mourn. The less we are distracted by worldly things, the more we can see the plight of those who have-not...and we share in their sadness. Wisdom calls for us to really sympathize with the suffering (or have a “burden” like the prophets say). Worldliness and self-consumption blind us, while poor in spirit allows us to share with the suffering of others and mourn with them. And by sharing, we find comfort for ourselves and others. Those who constantly stuff themselves are never comforted for long or ever satisfied.
- 3) Meek. Those who give up worldly ambition and mourn with the suffering won’t seek things that often get us into trouble (one-ups-man-ship; fighting with others over worldly goods; seeking power over others). This makes us look weak, when really, we are meek...and we avoid the kill-or-be-killed end that comes from living the rat race. Thus...we inherit the earth.
- 4) Hunger and Thirst (for righteousness). Those who live this way and seek righteousness often go without things of this world; but since they don’t satisfy, we can focus on what actually does satisfy us. This is why Christians fast...to remind us that righteousness and the kingdom of God provides real satisfaction (love, joy, peace, patience...), while fighting and clawing for power, money, and fame never satisfies.
- 5) Merciful, Pure in Heart, Peacemakers. Wisdom calls for us to be healers, bridge-builders, a positive force for good in the world. We can see the good

in others, and bring out the good in others, because we aren't trying to beat them, overtake them, overthrow them...but to serve them. And its true...merciful people are shown mercy; those who seek for peace are considered "heavenly" as opposed to those who only fight.

- 6) Persecuted. Ultimately, however, no one lived this life better than Jesus...who was violently persecuted. The kingdoms of the world find this way of living to be a threat (because it's a direct challenge to their value system). Don't expect to be appreciated by the world...but wisdom says there is a much better way of life that doesn't end in this life...thus persecution may be necessary, but the ultimate end is better than what the world has to offer in order to avoid persecution.

Ask the class which of these two readings ("blessings to be received" or "a way of life to achieve") makes better sense. It is possible that Jesus is offering both. That is my view. This sermon has many layers. Perhaps there is hope to the hurting and a challenge to the comfortable. Someone once said sermons should "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

A teacher of mine once read "blessed are the poor."

Then he said, "raise your hand if you want to be blessed." All hands went up.

Then he said, "raise your hand if you wish to be poor." No hands went up.

He then paused and said, "It's possible that we won't fully understand what this verse means, until we choose to be what Jesus calls blessed."

Food for thought!

4) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own) and tell them you will all report on our exercise at the beginning of next week.

Speech

- When someone compliments you, respond with a simple "thank you."
- When you fail, give no excuses. Simply say "I'm sorry."
- In every interaction with others, take the posture of listening not talking.

Dress

- Do not wear clothes that lead to pride or self-consciousness

Work

- Do "dirty jobs" like washing dishes, or pulling weeds, or serving someone alone and in secret

Questions from Book Readings Associated with Week 2

Questions from Harris (pp. 27-38)

Is it hard to read these as blessings? Why or why not?

Do you feel blessed by God?

Do you really believe the poor, the mourning, and the persecuted are “blessed”?

Questions from Gallagher (25-38)

What does Jesus mean when he says these characteristics are “blessed”?

Which beatitude do you find most difficult, and why?

Which beatitude do you think is most sorely in need today?

Questions from Bonhoeffer (105-114)

Which beatitude stood out to you the most after reading Bonhoeffer take on them?

Bonhoeffer says the blessed have “renounced their own righteousness and renounced their own dignity.” What do you need to renounce to look like that today?

Bonhoeffer says the only place for such people is the cross. What does he mean by that?

Putting This into Practice

Speech

- When someone compliments you, respond with a simple “thank you.”
- When you fail, give no excuses. Simply say “I’m sorry.”
- In every interaction with others, take the posture of listening not talking.

Dress

- Do not wear clothes that lead to pride or self-consciousness

Work

- Do “dirty jobs” like washing dishes, or pulling weeds, or serving someone alone and in secret

Other Suggested Helps for Week 2 for Teachers or for your Class

Video

Tim Mackie, “A Kingdom of Blessing.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RAZPetppV4&ab_channel=TimMackieArchives

Dallas Willard. “Divine Conspiracy: The Beatitudes.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxkaVGVhkuA&ab_channel=DanielVieira

Audio/Podcast

Tim Keller, “The Upside Down Kingdom.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTZ3GfL9yQM&ab_channel=GospelinLife

Tim Keller, “Blessed are the Poor.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRmMccP1A9M&ab_channel=GospelinLife

Further Reading

Nathan Guy, “Reading the Beatitudes 1: Hope and Summons.”

<https://healthytheology.com/reading-beatitudes-1-sermon-mount-17/>

Nathan Guy, “Reading the Beatitudes 2: Helpful Tips.”

<https://healthytheology.com/reading-beatitudes-2-sermon-mount-18/>



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 3: Reign or Shine

Object of the Class: To acknowledge that, since Jesus reigns, Christians ARE salt and light, whether we want to be or not! We stand out, we reflect Jesus either well or poorly, and we are called to affect our world for good at all times.

Suggested Outline for Class:

Consider playing Lauren Daigle’s song before class begins (listed at the end here).

1) Opening Conversation

What is “salt” and how do you use it? Have you ever tried something that desperately needed salt? What makes it good?

Light is a disinfectant. Discuss how light works to cleanse and purify (literally) but also metaphorically (“shining light on a situation”).

Do you and your spouse fight over the temperature in your house? How have you compromised?

2) The World, The Church, & The Worldly Church

What is the difference between a thermometer and a thermostat?

Thermometer reflects and reports the temperature in the room.

Thermostat actually changes/affects the temperature in the room.

In what ways are Christians sometimes thermometers and sometimes thermostats? Name a Christian person, or a church, or a Christian story (in history or current) that strikes you as a “thermostat” person or story.

Summarize first half of Randy Harris Chapter (pp.39-48).

Question: Which of the following statements seems more pressing/concerning:
There is not enough church in the world (the world acts ungodly)
There is too much world in the church (the church is indistinguishable)

Example (borrowed from Rick Atchley): “We always blame Hollywood and Washington. Why are we surprised that sinners sin? The problem isn’t that sinners sin; the problem is that the church can’t wait until Saturday night to spend \$12 to watch them do it!”

Discuss ways that the church has become too attached to worldly values.

1 John 2: lust of flesh, lust of eyes, pride of life

Galatians 5: jealousy, envy, strife, etc.

Are money, sex, and power still problems for Christians?

Is lack of persecution a sign that we aren’t doing it right?

3) You ARE Salt and Light

Summarize second half of Randy Harris chapter (pp. 39-48).

Randy uses the example of pronouncing “man and wife” at a wedding. Those words actually bring something into existence that didn’t exist before. It’s a power moment. Jesus doesn’t say “you SHOULD BE” salt and light, he says you ARE salt and light. In other words. You ARE examples and representatives, and world changers. The only question is: will it be for good or bad?

List examples or ask for examples where Christians might engage in an activity and hope no one knows who they are (or not wearing their work logo, or not wearing their church T-Shirt).

Discuss what “bad salt” or “bad light” does (“good for nothing”). What does it mean if Christians are “bad salt” or “bad light”? [If you have examples, bring them to class]

End the class by pronouncing everyone in the class “salt” and “light.”

4) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own) and tell them you will all report on our exercise at the beginning of next week.

- 1) Serve a meal to someone this week.
- 2) At every meal or celebration this week, take the lowest position. Take the place of servant in every situation you are in this week.
- 3) If you are not used to wearing a cross, wear one this week that is clearly visible, so that everything you do becomes a visible sign of Jesus, and your actions reflect on the cross.

Questions from Book Readings Associated with Week 2

Questions from Harris (pp. 39-48)

Are Christians separate enough from the world to make any difference?

What does it *really* mean to be salt and light in the world?

Do you believe you are making a difference in the world? Why or why not?

Questions from Gallagher (39-50)

How do bible metaphors for “salt” help us understand this passage?

How does Jesus connect Isaiah’s call for us to be a “light to the nations”?

How does Jesus define “light” in Matthew 5:16? How do you apply this?

Questions from Bonhoeffer (115-120)

The disciples must not only think of heaven; they have an “earthly task” as well. What is that?

You are the salt of the earth whether you like it or not. Explain.

People are to see our good works as we shine as the light of the world. Explain.

Putting This into Practice

- 4) Serve a meal to someone this week.
- 5) At every meal or celebration this week, take the lowest position. Take the place of servant in every situation you are in this week.
- 6) If you are not used to wearing a cross, wear one this week that is clearly visible, so that everything you do becomes a visible sign of Jesus, and your actions reflect on the cross.

Other Suggested Helps for Week 2 for Teachers or for your Class

Audio/Podcast

Lauren Daigle, “Salt and Light” (audio).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZNx5S5zuqs&ab_channel=LaurenDaigleVEVO

Further Reading

Tim Keller, “The Bible on Church and Culture” (April 1, 2008).

<https://timothykeller.com/blog/2008/4/1/the-bible-on-church-and-culture>

Tim Keller’s National Prayer Breakfast for Parliament Speech (2018).

<https://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/Tim-Keller-s-message-to-the-UK-Church-Stand-apart-from-culture-or-risk-being-ineffective>



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 4: Calling All Neurotics: Life, Love & the Law

Object of the Class: To see the purpose BEHIND the law, and the value OF the law, so that we can enjoy living under the liberating “rules” of Christ.

Suggested Outline for Class:

Read Matthew 5:17-20. Ask what seems hardest/weirdest in this section. Get some good questions.

1) Opening Conversation

Ask the class: “how many of you would say you are natural rule-followers?” Let them give some examples. “What do you find so satisfying about rules?”

Ask the class: “how many of you would say you are NOT natural rule-followers?” Let them give some examples. “What do you find so unsatisfying about rules?”

Discuss the strengths and weaknesses, the pluses and minuses about rules.

2) Two Kinds of “righteousness”

Look at the article “Calling all neurotics.” There you will find verses supporting two kinds (or two definitions) of “righteousness.” Write these on the board and have people read sections of Scripture.

On the one hand, righteousness can mean “right living.”

(Psalm 119:172; 1 John 3:7; Romans 14:17; 1 John 3:7)

There is a call in Scripture for us to live right. And living right is being “righteous.” Discuss why it matters how we live.

On the other hand, righteousness can mean “right standing.”

Psalm 143:2; Romans 3:20-24; Romans 5:1, 9; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:7-9)

A good example is when you are guilty of speeding, but the judge tosses the case out of court. You are guilty, but you’ve been given “right standing” with the court, therefore they give you something you didn’t earn. Jesus gives us “right standing” thus we have a “righteousness” that is not our own! Discuss why it matters that we have right standing that we didn’t earn.

3) Calling All Neurotics: Freedom in Christ

Summarize the article “Calling All Neurotics.” Stress the freedom we have in Christ. Ask if anyone is a “recovering neurotic.” Tell those who are not natural rule-followers, that Jesus understands, and paid the price for you!

4) O How I Love Your Law!: Considering the “Grace” of the Law

On the other hand, there is a FALSE view that the God of the Old Testament was all about law, and the God of the New Testament is all about grace. Or that God’s people hate law-keeping but love freedom. The truth is that David in Psalm 119 can say “O how I love your law!” and Paul in the New Testament can say “the law is Holy, righteous, and good.” Why? Discuss how parents who have rules for their children provide structure that makes their kids feel loved and safe. Discuss how “freedom” can be a prison to our own desires.

God’s people—in both Testaments—see grace IN God’s guidelines; and a God who gives guidelines loves and cares for his people. The difference is this:

We often think we must achieve right living (perfectly) so that God will give us right standing.

But in the New Testament, we are told that Jesus gives us “right standing” SO THAT we can be empowered for right living!

Read Romans 8:1-13. Discuss how the new covenant—being “free in Christ” and being set free from the “law of sin and death” involves having God’s Spirit who empowers us SO THAT we can live right (according to God’s laws).

Tell those who are natural rule-followers that Jesus appreciates that and does have guidelines for our lives!

5) The Goal Behind the Law...Getting to the HEART of the Law

Read Matthew 5:17-20 again. Now ask what it means for your righteousness to “exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees”? Tell them how the religious leaders were great at rule-keeping (going above and beyond in keeping rules) but often missed the point of the law (like letting a person stay hurt on the Sabbath rather than to heal them). The point of the law was to teach people to respect holiness—but healing your neighbor is being holy!

“Law” was always intended to lead to purer hearts and holier lives.

Does Jesus expect New Testament Christians to “keep God’s law”? YES! But Paul summarizes the law as “love one another.” Discuss how that seemingly simple “rule” is both freeing but also very hard. Discuss how loving God and loving your neighbor actually demands far MORE from us than a list of rules we could “check off” by the end of the day.

Summarize Randy Harris’ Chapter.

Now, read the 10 commandments in Exodus 20. Ask people in the room “what is the point behind this law? What is the real goal of this law? What is the truth behind and above the rule?”

6) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own) and tell them you will all report on our exercise at the beginning of next week.

For each day this week, take one of the 10 commandments and go to the heart of the principle behind the command and try to practice it that day. Look for the deeper principle in that command of God.

Questions from Book Readings Associated with Week 2

Questions from Harris (pp. 49-60)

Jesus says that when we read the law what we find out is what God cares about. What does God care about?

Does following Jesus mean more about rules and regulations or does it mean calling people to living out deep discipleship?

Are you willing to put yourself under the discipline of the law the way Jesus sees it?

Questions from Gallagher (51-64)

What do you think the difference is between abolishing the Law and the Prophets and fulfilling them?

Did people think that Jesus was trying to abolish the Law and the Prophets? What might lead them to think that?

How can someone be more righteous than the Pharisees?

Questions from Bonhoeffer (120-125)

Jesus says to abandon the law is to separate ourselves from him. What does he mean?

Disciples “find their way to the law through the cross of Christ.” Explain.

“It is possible to teach the law without fulfilling it.” Explain.

Putting This into Practice

For each day this week, take one of the 10 commandments and go to the heart of the principle behind the command and try to practice it that day. Look for the deeper principle in that command of God.

Other Suggested Helps for Week 4 for Teachers or for your Class

Video

Tim Mackie, “Jesus and the Torah.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GHcEsIfu2Y&ab_channel=TimMackieArchives

Further Reading

Nathan Guy, “Calling All Neurotics.” <https://healthytheology.com/calling-neurotics-sermon-mount-6/>

Tim Keller, “The Grace of the Law” (January 1, 2009).

<https://timothykeller.com/blog/2009/1/1/the-grace-of-the-law>



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 5: The Antidote to Anger

Object of the Class: To see anger as the heart of a problem that escalates. Our attitudes—what we think, and how we feel—matters to God, affects us profoundly, and determines our course of action.

Suggested Outline for Class:

Read Matthew 5:21-26. Ask what seems hardest/strangest in this section. Get some good questions.

1) Opening Conversation

Ask the class: “Is anger a good thing, a bad thing, or a neutral thing. Is it ever ok to be angry?”

There are two views in Christian history.

2) View #1: Yes, when it serves a righteous purpose.

Argument #1: The Bible says its ok to be angry sometimes.

Paul says be angry, but don't sin (Eph 4:26)

Jesus was angry (the bible says “indignation”) (Mark 1:41; 10:14; John 2:13-17)

God gets angry (Hebrews 3:17)

Prophets seem to get angry (the bible says “burden”).

Argument #2: We should be slow to be angry, but its not always a sin. (James 1:19). Notice that speaking is not a sin, but we should be slow to speak. The same with anger.

Argument #3: Anger is part of Justice/injustice. We should feel anger/rage/burden/pain at the sins of the world and the wrongs in the world. Surely anger is tied to “mourning.” And if we are to suffer with those who suffer, doesn’t that include feeling anger?

If you take this position, how do you interpret Matthew 5:21-26?

Hint: Jesus either says or assumes anger “without a cause” (a phrase that appears in the King James and New King James, but not in the NIV or ESV).

3) View #2: No, because anger is almost always wrong for us.

Argument #1: The best Greek text does not include “without a cause” in this passage. That means, Jesus just says it’s wrong to “be angry” with your brother.

Argument #2: Anger is only purely righteous if the person holding it is purely righteous (thus the stories of Jesus and God feeling anger as “righteous indignation” do not really apply to me).

Argument #3: Anger begins the downward spiral. (Think about the Star Wars line: Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering).

Jesus offers 6 case studies in Matthew 5. They all begin “you have heard it was said” then end with Jesus offering a radical new perspective. It may seem natural to think anger is a good thing, or merely neutral. But this approach argues that anger is a tool that gets weaponized by our impure motives.

Discuss how anger often leads to a downward spiral.

Dallas Willard says there is nothing good I can do well (or spiritually) WITH anger that I cannot also do WITHOUT it. Therefore, anger is of no use to the Christian.

If you take this approach, how would you interpret Matthew 5:21-26?

4) Rethinking how we THINK about one another.

Proverbs 23:7—“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” Discuss how the way we feel about something/someone affects how we think about something/someone. And how we think and feel about it affects how we treat them.

Summarize Randy Harris’ chapter. Use some of his examples when it comes to cutting people down, trash talking, etc.

Christians should be known not for tearing down, but for building up. Discuss what Christians should do when we find anger affecting how we view one another.

5) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own) and tell them you will all report on our exercise at the beginning of next week.

Identify people with whom you have unreconciled relationships. Make some effort toward reconciliation, or start approaching, and do it in such a way that it doesn’t blame the other person.

Questions from Book Readings Associated with Week 5

Questions from Harris (pp. 61-70)

What are ways we might begin with degrading thoughts, move to hateful thoughts, then end up with murderous thoughts?

Why is it easier to destroy than to build?

What have you done to restore a relationship in the last ten years?

Questions from Gallagher (65-76)

What do you think is the main principle for Jesus' test case about murder?

Questions from Bonhoeffer (126-131)

Why does this passage NOT describe Jesus as a revolutionary or someone simply putting opinions against each other?

“Anger is always an attack on the brother’s life.” Why is this so?

Bonhoeffer says there is one way to worship and follow Jesus—that is to be reconciled with our brothers. Explain this idea.

Putting This into Practice

Identify people with whom you have unreconciled relationships. Make some effort toward reconciliation, or start approaching, and do it in such a way that it doesn't blame the other person.

Other Suggested Helps for Week 5 for Teachers or for your Class

Video

Dallas Willard, "Living Without Anger."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBBB9G6WW3w&ab_channel=DanielVieira

Audio/Podcast

Tim Keller, "On Anger."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZ7cgVQGN7s&ab_channel=JayeshNaran

Further Reading

Baylor University, "Jesus and Anger: Does He Practice What He Preaches?"

<https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/235839.pdf>



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 6: Wanderlust

Object of the Class: To see how we view other people matters. People are not objects to be used. Lust reduces someone to an object, and it also reveals a lack of commitment—both to our spouse, but also to the person who should be treated with dignity. Lust continues the downward spiral.

Suggested Outline for Class:

Read Matthew 5:27-30. Ask what seems hardest/strangest in this section. Get some good questions.

1) Opening Conversation

Ask the class: “Think about the downward spiral. Matthew lists anger, then lust, then divorce. How many divorces are the result of anger or lust?” Discuss how anger and lust are often catalysts for breaking our covenants.

2) The Problem(s) With Lust

The following notes come from Tim Keller’s sermon listed at the end of this lesson.

There are CONSUMER GOODS (designed primarily for me to meet my needs) and COVENANT GOODS (something is primarily a gift for others). Our world thinks Sex is a consumer good; the Bible teaches sex is a covenant good. Discuss this.

(A) A healthy person living a healthy Christian life must find integrity between their body and their life. Sex should be a sign of what you’ve done with your

whole life. Sex is being completely vulnerable in front of the one other person who agrees to know your most vulnerable self and still love and affirm you. It's entirely wrapped up with trust, intimacy, togetherness, and affirmation.

C. S. Lewis says sex outside of marriage is so misguided because it's trying to isolate one kind of union while forgetting all the other kinds of union. It shows a lack of integrity. Within marriage, sex is a covenant renewal ceremony. It is deepening and solidifying.

Studies show that choosing to live together before marriage actually increases the likelihood of getting a divorce! This is because your sex life become a never-ending audition. Sex becomes simply marketing, rather than trusting, resting, and giving. This is why sex outside of marriage IN NO WAY prepares you for sex within marriage. Sex becomes the big lie. It promises consolation, closure, and affirmation. But sex outside of marriage doesn't do any of that, it actually destroys your freedom. On the other hand, within marriage, sex points toward heaven (Ephesians 5).

(B) Misplaced Sexuality hurts people and the culture. The Bible is POSITIVE about sexual desire (just read the Song of Solomon). But the way our culture thinks of sex is making people have unrealistic expectations about sex. As a result, men can't handle real relationships—they are far less willing to try dating or even get married. Also, as a result of the porn industry, women are increasingly being forced to accommodate sexual behavior and even their appearances to the images and the styles they think men want.

This damages us! So, Jesus is saying, “be drastic about changing the downward spiral!”

(C) Learn to think of Lusting as weak, damaging, and unreal. C. S. Lewis describes a culture where people gather to hoop and holler as a waiter slowly lifts the top off of the platter to reveal a mutton chop. If we saw that, we would think these people have a very misguided sense of food. But this is what happens at the strip joint, as men turn women into objects to lust after, rather than people to be loved and respected.

Ask the class, “how does a culture of lust negatively affect marriage, or one's future marriage?”

3) Finding A Solution

Have members of the class divide up based on gender lines. Have men share with other men about a way forward. Have women share with other women about a way forward. Have the groups make some examples of what “cutting off your own hand” might look like realistically in our day.

4) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own) and tell them you will all report on our exercise at the beginning of next week.

- (1) Do not use sexually suggestive humor or language. Walk away when it is used.
- (2) Stay away from all forms of media, computer, television, movies that tend to feature lust.
- (3) Pay particular attention to treat everyone—especially those of the opposite sex—with respect.

Questions from Book Readings Associated with Week 6

Questions from Harris (pp. 71-81)

What is badly wrong in our culture when it comes to sexuality?

In what way do you diminish the humanity of other people?

How can you develop a protection for your heart from the “second look” of lust?

Questions from Gallagher (65-72, 76-77)

“It is easier to harbor lust in your heart than at any other time in history.” Explain.

How does Jesus’ teaching on adultery relate to the 10th commandment: “Thou shalt not covet”?

Where does Jesus lay the blame for sin in this case—on the man or the woman?

Questions from Bonhoeffer (131-135)

“Adherence to Jesus allows no free reign to desire unless it be accompanied by love...A will dominated by lust can never be allowed to do what it likes.” Explain.

“Lust is impure because it is unbelief.” Explain.

“Christian marriage is marked by discipline and self-denial.” Do you agree?

Putting This into Practice

- (4) Do not use sexually suggestive humor or language. Walk away when it is used.
- (5) Stay away from all forms of media, computer, television, movies that tend to feature lust.
- (6) Pay particular attention to treat everyone—especially those of the opposite sex—with respect.

Other Suggested Helps for Week 6 for Teachers or for your Class

Video

Tim Mackie, “Jesus and Sexual Desire.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3PF2FEN_58&list=PLZ1ocmtU5AOeCEkYKe-E-WeADSTD3oa-0&index=7&ab_channel=TimMackieArchives

Audio/Podcast

Tim Keller, “Love & Lust”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUWnE6GeOiE&ab_channel=GospelinLife

Further Reading

C. S. Lewis, “Sexual Morality.” *Mere Christianity*, Book 3, Chapter 5. (Scroll down)

<https://www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/documents/apologetics/mere-christianity/Book3/cs-lewis-mere-christianity-book3.php>

Nathan Guy, “A Change of Desire.”

<https://healthytheology.com/change-desire-sermon-mount-4/>



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 7: To Tell The Truth

Object of the Class: To view transparent honesty as a core Christian value—the foundation of trust.

Suggested Outline for Class:

Read Matthew 5:33-37. Ask what seems hardest/strangest in this section. Get some good questions.

1) Ice Breaker

Play the game “Two Truths & a Lie.” (Each person writes down three statements. Two of them are true. One of them is a lie. Pick 3 people to play and have them read their list out loud. See if the class can guess which one is the lie for each participant).

2) Connecting the Sections

Ask the class: “Last week we asked how anger and lust often lead to divorce. The section on divorce comes between lust and truth-telling. This week, consider how divorce is often the “final straw” or the culmination of distrust. Marriage is the ultimate covenant-keeping act; adultery is the ultimate breach of trust. How does marriage, adultery, and divorce relate to truth-telling and honesty?”

3) To Tell The Truth

Read Matthew 5:37. Jesus is teaching against manipulation. It is easy to manipulate the truth. Think of ways we do this.

Used car salesmen have a reputation for this. What happens when we become people who manipulate the truth?

Why do we do this? List the reasons we tell ourselves. (hint: we want to control the outcome; we don't want to reveal our true selves; we want to appear better than we are; we want to hide our faults; etc.). Consider how all of our excuses fit Jesus' line "anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

Consider how the "downward spiral" is continued this way: anger, lust, manipulation.

Instead, we are called to be "truth tellers."

Read Randy Harris' "Moby Dick" illustration. Ask your class to be honest in their answer. How many would answer "yes" to the question "did you read Moby Dick?"

Spend some time sharing how Christian faith that God controls the outcome, and God calls us to love our neighbor, are two reasons we should not fear telling the truth.

Consider what "radical honesty" would look like?

4) Understanding the Point, Without Being Neurotic: The Power of Hyperbole

"Do not take an oath at all," says Jesus, and "do not resist an evil person." But can we raise our hand in court? Or pledge allegiance to the flag? Or join the boy scouts? Can we protect our families from home invasion? Can we refuse to send money to the Nigerian prince who sends us repeated emails?

Some well-meaning readers will say "surely Jesus means what he says here." Of course, he does. But it's not a question of whether Jesus meant it; it is a question of what he meant *by* it. If Jesus is really trying to give a one-stop shop rigid set of rules meant to be applied directly to every situation, then we ought to think people deserve to be put in maximum security facilities for harboring anger in their hearts. We ought to be against the practice of self-defense or serving as a defendant in court. You ought to never say "no" to your kid's constant request for money from your wallet.

Listen to this quote from Guy N. Woods, *Questions & Answers* (Henderson, TN: Freed Hardeman College, 1972), p. 307:

“Nor are judicial oaths, legal oaths, statements before notaries public, and the like common to the business of the world, forbidden...That it was not the purpose of our Lord...to forbid all oaths seems to follow from these considerations: (1) Jesus, before Caiaphas, testified under oath (Matt. 26:63, 64). (2) Paul often asserted things in the form of an oath: “For God is my witness, whom I serve...” (Rom. 1:9; see, also, II Cor. 1:23; Phil. 1:8; Gal. 1:20). (3) God, when he could swear by no greater, “Swore by himself.” (Heb. 6:13). The ancient prophets often invoked the name of God in their solemn affirmations (Isa. 65:16).” He concludes “In all circumstances, we are to say ‘Yes,’ when *yes* is the correct answer, and ‘No,’ when *no* is the true one. We are to tell the truth without the necessity of binding ourselves with an oath...Men ought to tell the truth for truth’s sake, and not simply because they are under oath so to do.”

What’s going on here is the power of *hyperbole*. Jesus is not giving “case law” (where a rule is meant to be applied hard-and-fast to every case); he’s demanding that we get to the heart of the matter, rather than settling for legal ease that justifies our selfish desires. He really means to challenge our constant need to manipulate the truth, or only be trustworthy when we are under oath. But trying to read this as a list of straight-forward rules for every case will drive you crazy. It was not intended that way.

It seems obvious, does it not, that Jesus is using an overstatement to emphasize the ideal: your word matters; speak the truth. Be a giving self-less person—even toward your enemies.

5) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own) and tell them you will all report on our exercise at the beginning of next week.

- (1) At the first hint of falsehood, seek to rectify it. If not, do so within one hour. Try not to speak to anyone until you have done so.
- (2) Call a friend every other night this week and confess your untruths. Reflect with one another why you are lying. The goal is to examine our hearts and discover the roots of our dishonesty.
- (3) Do not use the word “maybe” this week unless absolutely necessary.
- (4) At work this week, avoid wasting time (like Facebook or unnecessary chats). Ask your boss what else can be done.

Questions from Book Readings Associated with Week 7

Questions from Harris (pp. 83-92)

How would you answer Randy's question, "did you read Moby Dick?"

If there is a high enough price, is your integrity for sale?

Are you only honest when it leads to success? How about when it makes you look bad?

Questions from Gallagher (65-72, 77-78)

Look at some disastrous oaths in the Bible (Judges 11:30; Mark 6:22-23). How can oaths go wrong?

Does this mean we can't take oaths in court? Discuss.

Questions from Bonhoeffer (135-140)

"The oath is proof of the existence of lies in the world." Discuss.

No oaths means every word you utter is spoken in God's presence. Discuss.

Putting This into Practice

- (5) At the first hint of falsehood, seek to rectify it. If not, do so within one hour. Try not to speak to anyone until you have done so.
- (6) Call a friend every other night this week and confess your untruths. Reflect with one another why you are lying. The goal is to examine our hearts and discover the roots of our dishonesty.
- (7) Do not use the word “maybe” this week unless absolutely necessary.
- (8) At work this week, avoid wasting time (like facebook or unnecessary chats). Ask your boss what else can be done.

Other Suggested Helps for Week 7 for Teachers or for your Class

Video

Tim Mackie, “Jesus, Truth & Spin.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JM3hNJi8lg4&list=PLZ1ocmtU5AOeCEkYKe-E-WeADSTD3oa-0&index=8&ab_channel=TimMackieArchives

Audio/Podcast

Dallas Willard, “Case Studies in Anger, Contempt, and Cultivated Lust.”

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150606035039/http://www.bethinking.org/human-life/spiritual-formation/2-case-studies>



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 8: A Perfect Love

Object of the Class: To see “love of enemy” as the ultimate end of Jesus’ high calling, and the chief sign of Christian maturity.

Suggested Outline for Class:

Read Matthew 5:38-48. Ask what seems hardest/strangest in this section. Get some good questions.

1) Ice Breaker

Name some time in your life when it was hard to love a close friend. (Maybe they hurt you by mistake, or you were having a really bad day).

Now imagine how hard it must be to love your enemy!

2) What the Text is NOT saying

Watch John Piper’s video “Love Your Enemies” listed at the end of this paper. Perhaps watch it as a class.

Discussion question: Why does “love your enemies” NOT mean “always give your enemies whatever they think is best for them”? Share how it is reasonable and good to practice healthy boundaries in life. List some healthy boundaries, and situations where wisdom calls to keep those boundaries up.

Discussion question: how can we help sensitive hearts who might misunderstand and break down healthy boundaries, trying to follow Jesus’ commands?

3) Hearing the Challenge: What the Text IS saying

A lawyer friend of mine once said “Hard cases make bad law.” In other words, there may always be exceptions; but trying to include all the exceptions makes it hard to list clear guidelines that work in most normal circumstances. It is always a temptation to list exceptions and then “get off the hook” from the hard practices that are required of us.

Here, we already noted reasonable exceptions. But in most cases, in most normal circumstances, Jesus really is challenging us to “move the goalposts” of what we consider to be the extreme lengths we will go to show love to others.

Example 1: In Roman society, it was allowed for any soldier to force a person to carry their armor up to 1 mile and no more. Jesus says, “go an extra mile.” What would that look like in our daily lives?

Example 2: If someone asks for your coat, Jesus says “give him your shirt also.” What would that look like in our daily lives?

Example 3: Jesus challenges the typical approach that says you should love those who love you and give to those who give to you. Instead, he calls us to give to people who normally are takers, and to love people who don’t love us back. That is hard. It is demanding. But it is the way of Jesus. How did Jesus show this in his own life? You may wish to use Martin Luther King’s sermon “Love your enemies” listed at the end of this lesson for another illustration.

Discuss how this is the ultimate call of the second greatest commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Summarize Randy Harris’ chapter.

4) Be Perfect

Many people get confused and frustrated by Matthew 5:48: “Be perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.” Here are some helpful hints for interpreting this.

- Notice it’s the last line of the chapter. Think of it as the culmination of the whole chapter. He is saying, “make it your aim to be just like the Father.” That is the Christian standard, is it not?

- Be willing to read this with a sense of “reasonableness” that we use to read the rest of the chapter. We know there are situations where we would not “give” drugs to a person who asks for them. So, the verse is not meant to make you think Jesus’ commands are impossible.
- On the other hand, he doesn’t want us to set our standards any lower than Jesus set for himself.
- It might also be the case that Jesus is challenging us to think of ourselves as already called by God, already made holy by God; so---go live before others the way your Father in heaven already sees you. It could be another example of the two “righteousness” meanings coming together. God sees you as perfect in his sight; so, go live that way.

5) Making This Practical

We assume that “loving” starts with feelings. It does not. When the Bible says that God “loved”, it is usually followed by an action word. Ex: “God so loved the world that he GAVE...” This is because Christian love is an action word. C. S. Lewis once said don’t wait till you like your neighbor, before you love them; go ahead and love them. And if you love them long enough, you might end up liking them as well.

Have someone in the class read this section of Matthew from THE MESSAGE version. (You can find it online at biblegateway.com)

Have the class list some practical ways they can “love their neighbor” this week.

Have the class think if they have any “enemies.” Then ask, “what will you intentionally do this week to love that person?”

6) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own) and tell them you will all report on our exercise at the beginning of next week.

Any time you feel offended, coerced or taken advantage of, immediately seek to bless the life of the person responsible.

- (1) Pray for God’s eyes to see that person.
- (2) Plan something very practical to show love to that person.
- (3) Go over the top and see the radical love of God change things.

For this week, take the passage as literally as possible: give to everyone who asks of you.

Questions from Book Readings Associated with Week 8

Questions from Harris (pp. 93-106)

Does the legal system really keep us from being evil?

Do you have enemies?

Are you willing to try Jesus' way?

Questions from Gallagher (65-72, 78-92)

What problems do you see with abiding by Jesus' teaching in this section?

How would Jesus respond to these issues?

What do you think Jesus means by "be perfect"?

Questions from Bonhoeffer (140-154)

Summarize Bonhoeffer's take on "love your enemies."

Putting This into Practice

Any time you feel offended, coerced or taken advantage of, immediately seek to bless the life of the person responsible.

- (1) Pray for God's eyes to see that person.
- (2) Plan something very practical to show love to that person.
- (3) Go over the top and see the radical love of God change things.

For this week, take the passage as literally as possible: give to everyone who asks of you.

Other Suggested Helps for Week 8 for Teachers or for your Class

Video

Tim Mackie, "Love Your Enemy"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qO7OnQDdxwc&list=PLZ1ocmtU5AOeCEkYKe-E-WeADSTD3oa-0&index=9&ab_channel=TimMackieArchives

John Piper, "Love Your Enemies"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMRjbQL1eHE&ab_channel=DesiringGod

Audio/Podcast

Martin Luther King, Jr. "Love Your Enemies"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Fs8vSsJg-A&ab_channel=BrettBymaster

Reading

C. S. Lewis on Loving Our Enemies

<https://the-magpie.org/2020/07/01/lewis-on-loving-our-enemies/>



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 9: Our God Who Sees In Secret

Object of the Class: To find the value of “discipleship in secret” practices.

Suggested Outline for Class:

Ask how everyone did with the discipleship challenge last week. Take at least one example from the class.

Read Matthew 6:1-18. Ask what seems hardest/strangest in this section. Get some good questions.

1) Ice Breaker

Divide the class into two camps:

1-people who crave, thrive in, or deeply appreciate external motivation & validation (others says I’m doing a good job; that’s how I know I’m doing well)

2-people who find most of their sense of worth from internal motivation & validation (I believe I’m doing well based on my own criteria; that’s how I know...)

Have the groups discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their temperament/personality.

Share with the larger group 3 positives and 3 negatives with each approach.

2) “Openly”

Select someone to read in the King James or New King James version. Have them read Matthew 6:4, 6, & 18. Then ask everyone else in the class “what word did you hear in all three verses that does not appear in your own Bible version?” [The answer is the last word “openly.”]

Ask if it makes a difference.

Explain the difference:

King James/New King James are based on a theory of translation known as the “majority text” view: when you have 10 manuscripts, and 8 of them say “openly” while two of them do not, they include “openly” as the proper reading.

NIV/NRSV/ESV are based on a theory of translation known as the “eclectic” text view: when you have 10 manuscripts, follow the following rules:

- (1) Older is better. The earliest manuscripts are preferred over later ones.
- (2) Shorter is better. It’s more likely translators/copyists “added” explanation than that they took it away.
- (3) Harder is better than easier. It’s more likely translators/copyists “explained” or “smoothed out” difficulties rather than making them more difficult.

Based on these three criteria, it is concluded that “openly” was likely added later to explain and smooth out the reading.

The good news is that God has often showered blessings on people in public. But the point of this passage is to say that God does NOT promise public recognition in a world that craves it. It challenges us to re-imagine where we get our praise from.

Assure the “external validation” group that it is not necessarily sinful to have that personality (I do!). Tell them the goal is to get our external validation from God, rather than to fall prey to “people pleasing.”

Assure the “internal validation” group that it is noble to avoid people pleasing, but people pleasing also applies to ourselves! We are called to do and be what God calls us to do and be.

Both groups need to get out of their comfort zones, and to see God’s call to engage in a righteousness that is about God, not about us.

3) The Power of Secret

Read Ps 51:6. Renovare definition of secrecy: “Consciously refraining from having our good deeds and qualities generally known, which, in turn, rightly disciplines our longing for recognition.” Discuss the power of this idea.

Summarize Randy Harris' chapter. Discuss why "discipleship in secret" is a valuable Christian approach to living.

4) WHEN you PRAY

Discuss the importance of prayer. Feel free to use the links at the end of this lesson for help. Notice Jesus doesn't say "if" but "when."

What does it mean to "pray in secret"?

5) WHEN you GIVE

Discuss the importance of giving. Notice Jesus doesn't say "if" but "when."

What does it mean to "give in secret"?

6) WHEN you FAST

Discuss the importance of fasting. Notice Jesus doesn't say "if" but "when."

Why is it important for your fasting to be "in secret"?

7) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own) and tell them you will all report on our exercise at the beginning of next week.

Learn a new discipline of secrecy. Please the One not the many.

Look to do good deeds for people without them knowing it.

Ask yourself when you do something good, "am I doing this because it pleases God or others or myself?"

Questions from Book Readings Associated with Week 9

Questions from Harris (pp. 107-116)

What is the counterweight Jesus proposes to the desire to impress other people?

What examples can you think of when you wanted human affirmation more than God's affirmation?

How do we break free from an addiction to affirmation from people that overshadows affirmation from God?

How do you view generosity—as something done in secret or very publicly?
What do you think of secret generosity as a new spiritual discipline?

Questions from Gallagher (129-170)

What motivation for righteous deeds does Jesus condemn? Can you think of examples (from the Bible or your own life) of doing the right things for the wrong reasons?

Giving to the needy. Can you think of examples of giving for the wrong reason?

Prayer. How can our prayers be more like what Jesus wanted them to be?

Fasting. Has the church missed anything about fasting?

Questions from Bonhoeffer (155-172)

Summarize Bonhoeffer's take on righteousness through giving, praying, and fasting.

Putting This into Practice

Learn a new discipline of secrecy. Please the One not the many.
Look to do good deeds for people without them knowing it.
Ask yourself when you do something good, “am I doing this because it pleases God or others or myself?”

Other Suggested Helps for Week 9 for Teachers or for your Class

Video

Tim Mackie, “The Lord’s Prayer”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMmN8Ablo5s&list=PLZ1ocmtU5AOeCEkYKe-E-WeADSTD3oa-0&index=10&ab_channel=TimMackieArchives

Dallas Willard, “Prayer.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rd4_PKVVtVY&ab_channel=DanielVieira

Audio/Podcast

Tim Keller, series on the Lord’s Prayer

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMUkSbenVE&list=PL5EqDdkJLStXgDxLKtmvP2ZG-f4v5Y0zg&index=1&ab_channel=LamonicaShavonne

Reading

C. S. Lewis on the Lord’s Prayer [from his book *Letters to Malcolm*]

<https://livinghour.org/lords-prayer/commentary-by-c-s-lewis/>

Spiritual Disciplines Index: Secrecy

<https://renovare.org/articles/spiritual-disciplines-index-secrecy>



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 10: When You Haven't Got A Prayer

Object of the Class: To put our trust and investments in God & value simplicity.

Suggested Outline for Class:

Ask how everyone did with the discipleship challenge last week. Take at least one example from the class.

Read Matthew 6:19-34. Ask what seems hardest/strangest in this section. Get some good questions.

1) Ice Breaker

List on the board some things we worry about.

Then list on the board some “stuff” we (as a society) tend to seek or accumulate.

Then, divide the list into things we “must have” and things we “want to have.”

2) The Problem With Worry

Worry does absolutely nothing good for you. It can't change a thing. It only makes your feelings about the situation worse. And it signals a lack of trust.

So why do we worry? [Ask the class for some ideas]

Why is worry a *spiritual* problem?

3) The Problem With Stuff

Jesus connects a section on worry with a section on investing in earthly things vs. investing in heavenly things. What is the connection between “stuff” and “worry”? One answer is that the more stuff we accumulate, the more we have to worry about.

There does seem to be a connection between “having more” and “worrying more.” Jesus teaches us to be givers, to be poor in spirit, and to conquer things like lust (including lust for riches). Is it possible that our longing for more is contributing to our worry?

4) Worry About Stuff: Summarizing the Lesson

Summarize Randy Harris’ chapter. Go over the “challenge” for the week and discuss how we fall short of these things.

5) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own) and tell them you will all report on our exercise at the beginning of next week.

Buy things for their usefulness, not their status.

Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you.

Develop a habit of giving things away.

Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry.

Learn to enjoy things without owning them.

Develop a deeper appreciation for the creation.

Look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes.

Obey Jesus’ instructions about plain, honest speech.

Reject anything that breeds the oppression of others.

Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.

Questions from Book Readings Associated with Week 9

Questions from Harris (pp. 117-128)

Would you rather have a job you hate and keep all the money, or have a fulfilling job and share the salary with your family and friends?

Do you feel you need to take care of yourself because you aren't sure God will?

Compare the time and energy you have invested in things vs. relationships.

Do we use people and love things, or love people and use things?

Questions from Gallagher (171-188)

What is the main point Jesus is getting at in these verses?

How would Jesus' call not to worry about material possessions have sounded to Jesus' original audience? How is that different than today?

What does it mean to seek God's kingdom?

Questions from Bonhoeffer (173-181)

"The life of discipleship can only be maintained so long as nothing is allowed to come between Christ and ourselves." Discuss.

Worldly possessions tend to turn the disciple away from Christ. Discuss.

"Anxiety is characteristic of the Gentiles." What does he mean by this?

Putting This into Practice

Buy things for their usefulness, not their status.
Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you.
Develop a habit of giving things away.
Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry.
Learn to enjoy things without owning them.
Develop a deeper appreciation for the creation.
Look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes.
Obey Jesus’ instructions about plain, honest speech.
Reject anything that breeds the oppression of others.
Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.

Other Suggested Helps for Week 10 for Teachers or for your Class

Audio/Podcast

Tim Keller, “Peace: Overcoming Anxiety”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vduGmIISacQ&ab_channel=GospelinLifeGospelinLife

Dallas Willard, “Living Without Hurry & Worry.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ta_A1Po-xaE



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 11: Judgy McJudgerson

Object of the Class: To let God be the judge; to see ourselves clearly enough that we discern gracefully and see others as God sees us.

Ice Breaker:

“List some things/traits you like best about people.”

“Now list some things/traits you like least about people.”

Are there things that one person the class puts in the first category that someone else in the class puts in the second category? Discuss how ‘preference judgments’ are not objective.

1) Two Kinds of Judgment Exercise

Exercise #1: Judgments We Like

List some rules that you like to have in society. (If there are any judges or lawyers in your class, ask them especially).

Explain how these are examples of judgments. Perhaps share some “Judge Judy” examples where people act badly and it’s good to have someone who holds them to account. Discuss the value of this kind of “judging.”

One kind of judgment is “discernment,” or “choosing between two options” (such as right and wrong). Jesus actually calls us to make righteous or correct judgments (John 7:24). Joshua says to “choose you this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15). Proverbs challenges us often to choose the good and avoid the bad.

So, are we not to judge at all? Is judgment ever appropriate? Can you think of times that Jesus judged?

Exercise #2: Judgments We Don't Like

Ask people to share (if they wish) of examples where they felt judged (condemned, criticized) unfairly or prematurely. Discuss how “surface level” judgments, or first-impression judgments can color how you see someone forever—even if untrue.

Discuss the problem with this kind of “judging.” Why is it wrong to judge harshly or rashly? Are you particularly judgmental in areas where you think you've got it all figured out? Think of examples where you once were very judgmental about something before you experienced it yourself.

2) The Golden Rule and Judgment

Jesus says you will be judged by “the same measure” you use to judge others (Matt 7:1-2). This seems to point us forward to the golden rule of Matt 7:14: Do unto others the same as you would have them do unto you.”

How do you want to be judged? (Discuss as a class)

3) The Benefit-of-the-Doubt Principle

Summarize Randy Harris' chapter. Randy asks what would happen if everyone adopted the “benefit-of-the-doubt” principle. Assume the best about everyone and every situation. If it can be interpreted well or poorly, choose well. If a person is obviously wrong toward you, assume it was an off day, or they misunderstood, or they didn't realize what they were doing. (Jesus on the cross is a great example)

Benefit of the doubt is easiest if we realize how God treats us first. C. S. Lewis once said, “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”

Give some examples of what would happen in relationships if everyone adopted this attitude.

How can we give up a judgmental attitude?

4) Rights and Power Under the Cross

Bonhoeffer spends time in his section discussing “rights” and “power.” Remember that he was in 1930’s Nazi Germany, not 21st century American democracy. He challenges Christians to give up our obsession with “rights” and “power.” Judgment is rooted in the pride and fighting that comes with our claim to rights and power. But if we renounce these things, we lose the need, the desire, and the standing to make judgments toward our neighbors.

Discuss the idea of “rights” and “power” and compare this to the second greatest commandment: “to love your neighbor as yourself” and the Golden Rule: “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

5) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own) and tell them you will all report on our exercise at the beginning of next week.

Speak only what love requires. Pick a time period and experiment with speaking only out of love. That means no judgmental or harsh tone of talking.

No sarcastic speech. Speak only what love requires, meaning bring focus to what you say, saying things that loving people requires but nothing more. It may require you to be more silent than normal.

Questions from Book Readings Associated with Week 11

Questions from Harris (pp. 129-138)

Are we not to judge at all or just not judge too harshly?

What would happen in relationships if everyone adopted the benefit-of-the-doubt principle?

Are you particularly judgmental in areas where you think you've got your act together?

Do you change the subject when something comes up you are not particularly good at?

Questions from Gallagher (189-206)

Is judging ever appropriate? Can you think of times when Jesus judged?

Jesus says those who judge will be judged (Matt 7:1). Will be judged by whom?

Compare the Greatest Commands to the Golden Rule (Matt 7:12). Are they saying different things or the same thing?

Questions from Bonhoeffer (182-188)

Discuss what Bonhoeffer says about "rights" and "power" for the disciple.

Putting This into Practice

Speak only what love requires. Pick a time period and experiment with speaking only out of love. That means no judgmental or harsh tone of talking.

No sarcastic speech. Speak only what love requires, meaning bring focus to what you say, saying things that loving people requires but nothing more. It may require you to be more silent than normal.

Other Suggested Helps for Week 11 for Teachers or for your Class

Video

Tim Mackie, “To Judge or Not to Judge”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cd42flzT_eE&list=PLZ1ocmtU5AOeCEkYKe-E-WeADSTD3oa-0&index=12&ab_channel=TimMackieArchives

Reading

C. S. Lewis: “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 12: Who Do You Trust?

Object of the Class: How to discern between truth and falsehood, and those who offer true and false ways.

1) True and False Prophets

“Good trees produce good fruit.” Consider this illustration. Name some examples from your own life that shows the wisdom (and application) of this phrase.

“Bad trees produce bad fruit.” Consider this illustration. Name some examples from your own life that shows the wisdom (and application) of this phrase.

Jesus teaches that false prophets will appear to be innocent, non-threatening, and even friendly (sheep’s clothing), but are driven by insatiable desires that can do great harm (ferocious wolves). Since motives can be hard to determine, Jesus says “By their fruits you shall know them.” Discuss the importance of examining/judging fruit rather than assuming motives. But also discuss how bad fruit often hints at corrupt motives.

Notice how “false prophets” in this passage (like “false teachers” in other passages) emphasize the character and the actions of a person far more than differences in their understanding of issues. Is this significant? Do we sometimes emphasize differences of views (as reason to be suspicious) but fail to emphasize differences of values and character?

Who are some “false prophets” today? How do they come to us in “sheep’s clothing”?

2) True and False Disciples

Jesus clearly emphasizes the importance of obedient action and good fruits. Discuss the role of obedience in discipleship.

Notice that “many” will say on the day of judgment that they prophesied and even performed miracles and drove out demons in the name of Jesus, yet they will be sent away because they were “evildoers.” What strikes you about this passage? Are we ever guilty of letting fair words, or even ‘spiritual-seeming’ actions to blind us to character issues in people? What would it look like to emphasize true discipleship as “reminding us of Jesus’s character”?

What does it mean to “do the will of my Father who is in heaven?” Read the Lord’s Prayer again and discuss this question as a class.

Who are some “true” and “false” disciples today?

3) Keeping Score

Summarize Randy Harris’ Chapter.

4) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own) and tell them you will all report on our exercise at the beginning of next week.

Pick out three things Jesus cares deeply about and “live it out” this week.

Questions from Book Readings Associated with Week 12

Questions from Harris (pp. 139-146)

Have you ever done some big project, and no one appreciated anything of your work except for the bottom line?

How do you keep score in your relationships? How do you keep score with co-workers?

How does your church keep score with one another?

What are some practical ways you can change the way you keep score with one another in your home?

Questions from Gallagher (207-219)

What does Jesus mean that the way of life is narrow and difficult?

What do you think is the “bad fruit” that the false prophets will produce?

According to Jesus, what is the “entrance requirement” for the kingdom of heaven? How do you relate this to Ephesians 2:8-9?

Questions from Bonhoeffer (189-195)

Discuss what Bonhoeffer says about the narrow way and sheep and wolves.



LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Week 13: Practice Makes Perfect

Object of the Class: To put the Sermon on the Mount into practice.

1) Discussion Starter: Practice Makes Perfect.

Whether in sports, the arts, or any craft, we know that practice is essential to be successful. Give some examples. Ask the class what things in their life did it take lots of practice to become good at.

2) The Wise Man

Do you remember the VBS song “the wise man built his house upon the rock?” We also teach the same lesson to our kids with the story of the three little pigs. When you are facing a real obstacle, the strength of your foundation and the strength of your materials will make a difference of whether you can withstand the trouble. In life, rain is going to come. Pain, difficulty, sadness, temptation, and struggle will flood your life.

Ask the class these three questions:

- (1) How strong is your foundation? Ecclesiastes 12:1 says to remember God when things are going well so you can develop habits that will keep you from forgetting him when things get tough.
- (2) How are you “building your house”? Think about your spiritual habits. Do we give in to material things far more than spiritual things? What are the major voices influencing your life?
- (3) How do you know that you are building on the rock, and not on sand?

3) Put These Things into Practice

Look at Matthew 7:24. Jesus doesn't say "whoever hears these sayings of mine and commits them to memory..." He says "whoever hears these sayings of mine *and puts them into practice...*" This means Jesus expects us to live out the Sermon on the Mount.

Go through each major section of the Sermon on the Mount and ask the class what they have learned, and how they plan to "put them into practice."

The Beatitudes

Being Salt & Light

Anger

Lust, Sex & Marriage

Truth, Covenant Keeping & Lies

Retaliation & Love of Enemy

Righteousness in Life & Prayer

Worry and Material Things

Judging

True and False Ways and People

Wise and Foolish Builders

4) Challenge for the Week

Have everyone commit to the following challenge for the week (or add your own).

"I commit to setting spiritual goals to work on _____ by developing the habit of _____."