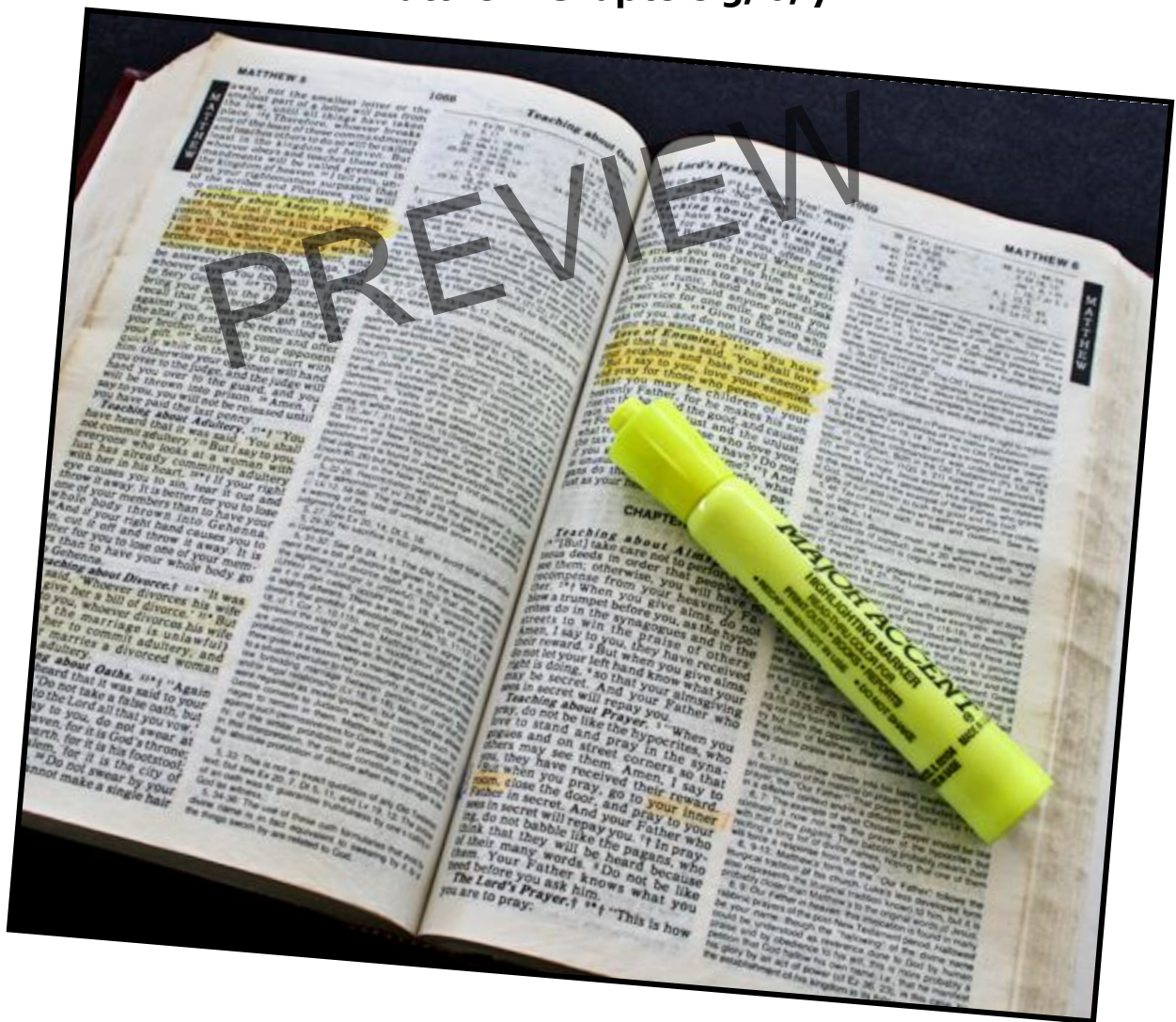


Holy Living

A Bible Study
on the
Sermon on the Mount
Matthew Chapters 5, 6, 7



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Session 1

Matthew 5:1- 6

As the scene opens, we see Jesus preparing to teach on a mountainside. In Biblical symbolism, when an event takes place on a mountain, it means that this is an important contact with God.

First, Jesus notices the crowd. We can imagine that he feels a great concern for each person. He understands their needs, and he wants to help them. The best teaching he can give them is one that will guide them into a more love-filled life – an abundant life in which they are closer to God than ever before, loving him more, becoming more aware of his love, and more able to love one another.

Picture yourself in the crowd. He is speaking to you, too. He is addressing the needs that you have today.

The first set of Beatitudes (verses 3-6) focuses on our relationship with God. The rest of them will center on our relationships with each other. This pattern reflects Jesus' core message: First love God with all your heart and soul and mind, and the second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37).

The first four Beatitudes tell us that God is the source of our happiness. When we accept into our daily lives the values of God's kingdom, we grow into a fuller relationship with him.

We are "poor in spirit" when we stop placing our confidence in material security or other false gods (the kingdom of the world). By depending instead on God (the kingdom of heaven), we experience his power and love and faithfulness.

We "mourn" when our fallen flesh-nature wants to take the easy path that leads to sin while our sanctified spirit chooses to resist and to take the

holy path. God comforts us while we struggle with it.

We are "meek" when we're submissive to God and obedient to his commands. Inheriting the "land" means becoming one of God's royal children in the kingdom of heaven on earth.

We "hunger for righteousness" when we want to live morally, i.e., when we want to conform our will to God's will. This hunger will be satisfied because God helps us achieve righteousness. Even though we may get frustrated with our spiritual progress, what may seem impossible for us is never impossible for God.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Describe a time when you felt poor in spirit, relying on God when it seemed easier or more sensible to trust in the things of this world.
2. Describe an experience of fighting against yourself because you did not want to do something God's way. Did your flesh-nature mourn when you refused to give in to it? How did God comfort you?
3. What are some rules of the Church that people don't like to obey? Is there a rule that you first disobeyed then obeyed? Why did you change? What effect did it have on your life?
4. Name ways that can help us grow in righteousness. What activities purify us? What has helped you become more loving or more morally upright?

Session 2

Matthew 5:7-12

The second half of the Beatitudes focuses on our relationships with each other. The first three of these (7-9) deal with how to live like Christ. Verses 10-12 show what results from that kind of living. The second half of the Beatitudes reflects the spiritual growth that is produced by the first half.

When we are poor in spirit and place our trust in God's mercy (verse 3), the next step is to give his mercy to others, and this results in the blessing of receiving even more of God's mercy (verse 7).

When we've wanted to sin but we've chosen instead to live God's way, even though it makes our flesh-nature mourn (verse 4), we become pure in our hearts and we can see God more fully, i.e., we dwell in the presence of God (verse 8). This purity allows the light of Christ in us to shine more brightly onto others, and they are brought closer to God through the witness of our lives.

When we are meek (verse 5), we become peacemakers (verse 9), because we no longer fight and argue with others. Consider how God deals with us when we choose the path of sin. Does he fight against us? Sometimes it seems like we're wrestling with him, but it's not God who's arguing: We're the ones who do all the complaining and yelling and struggling.

Being peacemakers means we live as his children by handling conflicts the same way he does. We love our enemies, forgiving them and doing good for them, regardless of whether or not they want to change. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, which tells us how God wants us to handle conflicts: by being patient instead of demanding, by showing kindness, by not being rude, by not defending our own causes, by not being quick-tempered or brooding over our injuries, by bearing whatever is done to us (however, this does not

mean we stay in abuse; Jesus always – except on Good Friday – walked away from his abusers), by never giving up hope, and by always enduring.

When we live this way, we become more like Christ than those who don't. For this reason they persecute us, trying to convince themselves that they should never become like us so that they won't have to give up their old ways and be converted. If we're not experiencing persecution, we're not really living the Beatitudes.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Name some of the contrasts between the world and Christianity (for example, lying versus honesty). How does the Christian way show purity of heart?
2. Tell the story of a time when you served as a peacemaker. How did it reveal Jesus to the people who witnessed what you did? If you saw that it made a difference in their spiritual lives, tell about that, too.
3. Describe a time when you were persecuted because of your relationship with God. Perhaps someone misunderstood your faith, or rejected you, or deliberately created problems for you. Did you feel blessed by it? Did you feel closer or further from Jesus when it happened? Did you grow spiritually or did you lose some faith because of it? Why?

Session 3

Matthew 5:13 - 16

"You are the salt of the earth" (verse 13). What does it mean to be salt? Think about what salt does. It adds flavor to something that lacks sufficient taste. Jesus also says that if someone loses his flavor, "with what can it be seasoned?" Re-read that as: "by *whom* can it be seasoned?"

Only God can renew a flavor that has been lost.

The Christian is someone who has been made flavorful — alive in holiness — by Christ's Holy Spirit.

The *useful* Christian is one who evangelizes by adding the seasoning of Jesus' love to another person's life. But beware of trying too hard! What happens when food is over-salted? It tastes terrible; people don't want to eat it.

No matter how good our intentions may be, if we come on too strong, we do more harm than help. Maybe we're trying to bring an unwilling spouse to church or to convince a neighbor to trust God, but they don't want a Jesus who seems condemning or forceful. They're much more likely to turn to a Jesus who loves them just the way they are, who is gentle, who serves them in their needs whether they deserve it or not.

Verses 14 - 16 tell us to be a light that others cannot help but notice. What kind of light? One that blinds? Of course not.

In John 8:12, Jesus says "I am the light of the world." Because of our baptism, Jesus' Spirit is within us. His glow should be what others see when they look at us.

We are not to hide our relationship with Jesus. An effective Christian is one whose faith is visible, whose glow is the love that comes from the Holy Spirit, and whose good deeds glorify the Father because they are accomplished through the resurrection power of Christ.

Notice in verse 14 that Jesus calls us a "city." We are not to evangelize alone. A city is a group of

people: a parish, a family, a church organization. Being Christian means being in community.

When our light is joined to the lights of others, our collective glow is much brighter and much more effective in revealing the love of Christ to the world. Why? Because when nonbelievers see Christians living out that love with each other, they become convinced that the love of Christ is real. How important it is that we love each other unconditionally, generously, and with a servant's heart (see Acts 2:42-47)!

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How do you know when someone's life is lacking the full flavor of God's love? And how can you season their life with the love of Jesus that shines within you?
2. Were you ever over-salted by someone who tried too hard to change you? How have you over-salted others? What were the results?
3. What obstructs the light of Christ that glows within us? Why don't others always see Christ in us? What blocks their view of him? What needs to be changed in us so that they can see him clearly?

Session 4

Matthew 5:17-20

The Jewish religious authorities of Jesus' day were often literalists in their interpretation of the Law of God, which

Session 16

Matthew 7:21-23

After warning against false prophets, Jesus now explains how to be a true disciple: Simply do the will of the Father. But what is his will? How can we be sure we correctly understand his will? How do we know if we really are true disciples of Jesus?

A disciple learns from and imitates his teacher. We are all disciples of something or someone — of whatever has been a source of learning.

For example, TV programs teach us that it's good to make fun of people. Business training tells us that it's appropriate to get as much money out of customers as we can. And we learn from being ridiculed and rejected that it is better to avoid talking about Jesus.

And yet, we profess to be Christians. We claim to be followers of Jesus — the same Jesus who said that poking fun at someone means we're belittling him or seeing him as having no value, which condemns us to Gehenna (Matt. 5:22), the same Jesus who never charged a fee for his services, the same Jesus who warned that if we are ashamed of him, he will be ashamed of us when we come before the Father at our death (see Mark 8:38).

None of us are perfect in our discipleship. We're not always true disciples, but neither were the first Apostles. So don't belittle yourself; God still loves you! He doesn't expect you to reach perfection while you're on this earth.

A true disciple is one who continually strives to become more like Jesus and keeps doing whatever he or she can do to improve, learning from mistakes and repenting from sins.

The "evildoer" who will be rejected by Jesus (verse 23) could be someone who goes to church every weekend, receives communion, and helps

out any way the pastor asks, for the sake of earning his way into heaven (a self-centered motive). Jesus said that the only people who enter heaven are those who do the will of the Father (verse 21).

What is the will of the Father? Jesus has been teaching it throughout the Sermon on the Mount: God's will is to love. Whatever we do that's loving is what unites us to Jesus, and he takes us to heaven. Our works on the road to heaven are motivated by love, and this is what proves that we are true disciples of Jesus. When we love the way Jesus loves, we do God's works of love.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Give examples of doing a good deed for self-centered motives and doing it out of care and concern for others.
2. What are self-centered reasons for going to church? What are the loving reasons? Name some other religious deeds and give reasons why they might be done for selfish purposes.
3. Describe a time when someone did a good deed serving your needs. Did you perceive love in that deed? What impact did it have on you?
4. What are doing in church or for the Church that you assume is God's will? In what ways could you do it more lovingly?