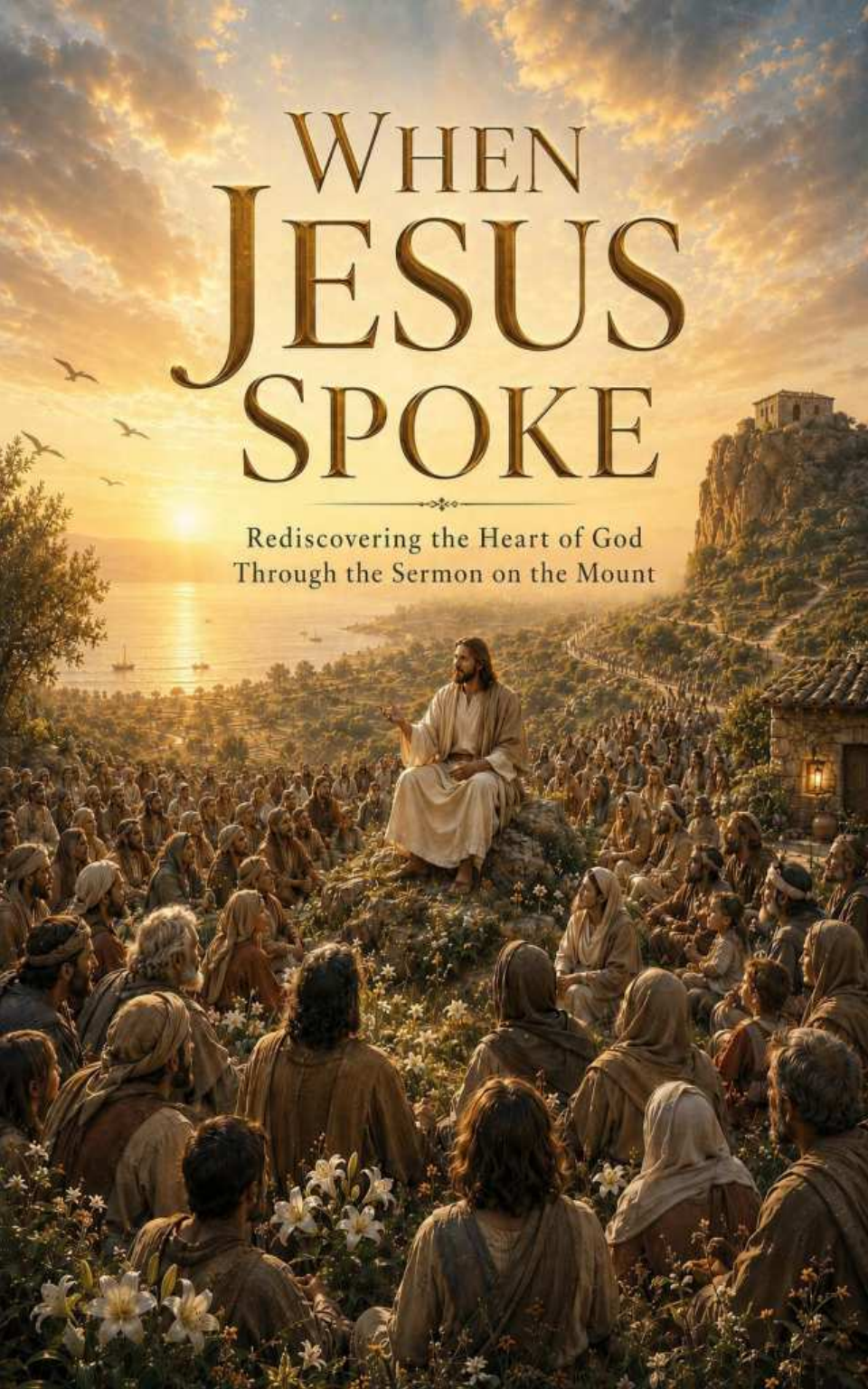
WHEN JESUS SPOKE

Rediscovering the Heart of God
Through the Sermon on the Mount



TERESA OELOFSE

When Jesus Spoke

Rediscovering the Heart of God Through the Sermon on the Mount

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Teresa Oelofse asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

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To every person who has ever opened God's Word and longed for something more.

To those who have searched for answers, wrestled with doubts, carried burdens, and wondered whether God still speaks today.

May these pages help you rediscover the heart of the One who has loved you from the beginning.

Above all, this book is dedicated to Jesus Christ, whose words continue to transform lives across every generation.

"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

— John 6:63 (KJV)

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Foreword

There are few things more precious than hearing the voice of someone you love.

A single sentence can bring comfort in a difficult season. A familiar voice can steady us when life feels uncertain. Words can shape our thoughts, direct our choices, and quietly influence the course of our lives.

For nearly two thousand years, people from every nation, culture, and generation have been drawn to the words of Jesus. His teachings have been studied by scholars, preached from pulpits, debated in classrooms, and shared around family tables. Yet, despite the countless books written about Him, many sincere believers still find themselves longing for something deeper.

Not more information.

Not more opinions.

Not more arguments.

They long to know God.

Perhaps you have felt that longing yourself. Perhaps there was a time when Scripture seemed alive, when prayer felt natural, and when every page revealed something beautiful about God's character. Or perhaps life has brought challenges, disappointments, losses, or unanswered questions that have made God seem more distant than He once did.

If so, you are not alone.

This book was written for people who desire more than religious knowledge. It was written for those who want to slow down, listen carefully, and rediscover the heart of God through the words of Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount is often regarded as the greatest sermon ever given. Spoken on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, it challenged assumptions, overturned expectations, and revealed a way of life unlike anything the world had ever seen.

Jesus spoke of blessing where others saw weakness.

He spoke of mercy in a world that demanded revenge.

He spoke of purity in a world content with appearances.

He spoke of trust in the midst of anxiety.

He spoke of love that extended even to enemies.

Most importantly, He revealed the character of His Father.

As you journey through these pages, you will be invited to do more than study the Sermon on the Mount. You will be invited to ask what the words of Jesus reveal about God, what they reveal about your own heart, and how Christ may be calling you to respond.

Take your time.

Read slowly.

Pause often.

Reflect honestly.

Allow the words of Jesus to speak for themselves.

The goal is not to rush through another study guide. The goal is to spend time with Christ and allow His teachings to shape your understanding, deepen your faith, and draw you closer to the Father.

My prayer is that this journey will help you rediscover the beauty, wisdom, grace, and truth found in the words of Jesus.

May you come away with a clearer picture of God's character, a deeper appreciation for His love, and a renewed desire to walk with Him each day.

The crowd once gathered on the mountainside to hear Jesus speak.

This book is an invitation to join them.

Preface

The purpose of this journal is not merely to provide information about Scripture, but to encourage thoughtful reflection upon it.

Each chapter invites you to read, consider, and respond to the teachings of Christ. As you journey through the Sermon on the Mount, pause often. Ask what the passage reveals about God, what it reveals about yourself, and how God may be inviting you to respond.

Take your time. The goal is not to finish quickly, but to listen well.

Acknowledgments

My deepest gratitude belongs to God, whose Word continues to guide, challenge, and transform lives.

Thank you to the countless believers throughout history who have preserved, studied, taught, and shared the Scriptures.

And thank you to every reader who chooses to undertake this journey. May the words of Jesus bring encouragement, wisdom, and hope as you walk with Him.

I

The Kingdom Begins

Jesus begins His sermon by overturning human ideas of blessing. The kingdom does not begin with power, status, or religious performance. It begins in the surrendered heart: poor in spirit, grieving over sin, meek before God, hungry for righteousness, and open to grace.

1

The Mountain

```
Scripture
"And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a
mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came
unto him:
And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,"
 Matthew –5:12, KJV
```

When Jesus Spoke

Before Jesus spoke the Beatitudes, He climbed a mountain.

That detail may seem small. It is easy to pass over it quickly, as though Matthew were simply giving us the setting before the real teaching begins. But Scripture rarely wastes a scene. The place matters. The posture matters. The people matter. Before we hear the words of Jesus, we are first invited to see Him.

The multitudes had followed Him.

They came from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and

beyond Jordan. Some came because they had heard Him teach. Some came because they had seen Him heal. Some came carrying pain in their bodies. Others carried disappointment in their hearts. Many came with national hopes, expecting the Messiah to overthrow Rome, restore Israel's glory, and bring visible victory.

But Jesus did not begin by raising an army.

He went up into a mountain.

There, seated in the open air, surrounded by disciples and multitudes, Jesus began to teach the nature of His kingdom. Not a kingdom built first through force, status, wealth, or political triumph, but a kingdom that begins in the heart.

The Sermon on the Mount does not begin with human achievement.

It begins with Jesus seated among ordinary people, ready to reveal the heart of God.

Understanding the Setting

Matthew places this moment after a season of public ministry in Galilee. Jesus had been preaching, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). He had called disciples from their nets. He had healed the sick. His fame had spread. The crowds had grown.

By the time He went up the mountain, the people were waiting for something.

Many expected the Messiah to bring national deliverance. They had been shaped by longing, oppression, and religious expectation. They knew the promises of God, but many had misunderstood the way those promises would be fulfilled. They were looking for a throne. Jesus was preparing to reveal a

kingdom.

This mountain also echoes earlier moments in Scripture.

Long before this day, Israel had stood before mountains where blessings and curses were proclaimed. Moses had received God's law on Sinai. The mountain was a place of revelation, covenant, and divine instruction. But now Jesus, the true Teacher, sits on a mountainside near Galilee and opens His mouth.

This is not merely another rabbi explaining religious tradition.

This is the Son revealing the Father.

Ellen G. White describes the Sermon on the Mount as "Heaven's benediction to the world" and "a voice from the throne of God." In this sermon, Christ speaks not only to His immediate hearers but to the whole human family. The mountain becomes a place where heaven bends low enough for weary people to hear the heart of God.

Understanding the Teaching

Matthew 5:1–2 does not yet give us the content of the sermon. It gives us the posture from which the sermon must be received.

First, Jesus sees the multitudes.

He does not withdraw because the people are needy. He does not despise them because their motives are mixed. He sees them. Their hopes may be confused. Their theology may be incomplete. Their expectations may be earthly. Yet He does not turn away.

Second, Jesus goes up into a mountain.

He creates space for teaching. He draws the people away from noise and urgency. The kingdom will not be understood in the rush of the crowd alone. It must be heard in stillness, attention, and surrender.

Third, Jesus sits.

In the ancient world, a teacher often sat to instruct. His posture carries calm authority. He is not anxious. He is not performing. He is not competing for attention. He is the Teacher of truth, and His authority does not need force to make itself felt.

Fourth, His disciples come to Him.

The sermon is heard by the crowd, but it is especially formed around discipleship. Those who would understand Jesus must come near. The words of Christ are not merely ideas to admire from a distance. They are words to be received, obeyed, and lived.

Finally, Jesus opens His mouth and teaches.

The kingdom begins with revelation. We do not discover God's heart by guessing. We know Him because He speaks.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This opening scene reveals a God who comes near.

The people on the mountain were not spiritually impressive. They were not all mature disciples. Some were curious. Some were desperate. Some were ambitious. Some were broken. Some were watching Jesus with suspicion. Yet Christ sat among them and taught.

This is the heart of God.

He does not wait until people fully understand Him before He speaks mercy to them. He does not require perfect motives before He begins His work of restoration. He meets people where they are, but He loves them too deeply to leave them unchanged.

The mountain shows us a **God who teaches**.

That matters. God does not merely command from a distance. He explains. He reveals. He forms the conscience. He corrects

false expectations. He opens the way of life.

Jesus could have begun by condemning the crowd's political ambitions. He could have exposed every selfish hope at once. Instead, He begins to unfold a better kingdom. He does not merely tear down false ideas. He reveals the truth that can heal them.

The mountain also shows us a **God who blesses.**

Before Jesus speaks about anger, lust, retaliation, prayer, money, anxiety, judgement, and obedience, He begins with blessing. The first movement of the sermon is not threat, but invitation. Christ reveals a Father whose kingdom is not closed to the weak, the grieving, the meek, the hungry, the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers, and the persecuted.

God's heart is not harsh toward those who come honestly.

He sees more than our confusion.

He sees what grace can make of us.

Looking Within

It is possible to stand in the crowd around Jesus and still misunderstand His kingdom.

The people came with expectations. So do we.

We may come to Jesus wanting Him to fix our circumstances, defend our opinions, bless our plans, confirm our assumptions, or give us peace without transformation. We may want the comfort of His presence without the surrender of discipleship.

Matthew 5:1–2 quietly asks us where we are standing.

Am I part of the crowd, interested in Jesus but still keeping my distance?

Am I willing to come near as a disciple?

Am I ready to let Jesus correct my idea of blessing, success,

righteousness, and freedom?

The Sermon on the Mount cannot be received properly by a proud heart. It is not a decoration for religious life. **It is the constitution of Christ's kingdom.** It searches motives. It exposes hidden loyalties. It calls the heart away from performance and into living communion with the Father.

But this searching is not meant to crush us.

It is meant to bring us near.

The same Jesus who teaches holiness is the Jesus who sees the multitude with compassion. He does not reveal truth to humiliate the sincere seeker. He reveals truth to heal the human heart.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites you to come up the mountain.

Not physically, but spiritually.

He invites you to step away from the noise long enough to listen. He invites you to bring your hopes, fears, ambitions, disappointments, and assumptions into His presence. He invites you to become more than an observer of religious truth. He invites you to become a disciple.

Before you rush into the Beatitudes, pause on the mountainside.

See Him seated.

See the crowd gathered.

See the disciples drawing near.

Then ask yourself: **Am I willing to let Jesus define the kingdom for me?**

The Sermon on the Mount begins when we stop trying to make Jesus fit our expectations and begin allowing His words to

reshape us.

Today, His invitation is simple:

Come near.

Sit with His Word.

Listen before you answer.

Let the King teach you the heart of His kingdom.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for speaking to us through Jesus. Thank You that You do not leave us to guess what Your heart is like. You have revealed Yourself in Your Son.

Help me to come near as a true disciple. Quiet the noise in me. Correct my false expectations. Open my heart to the words of Jesus.

Teach me to see Your kingdom as Christ revealed it. Let this journey through the Sermon on the Mount lead me beyond information into deeper relationship with You.

May I not only hear the words of Jesus, but receive them, trust them, and live them.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Journal Notes

What expectations do I bring to Jesus right now?

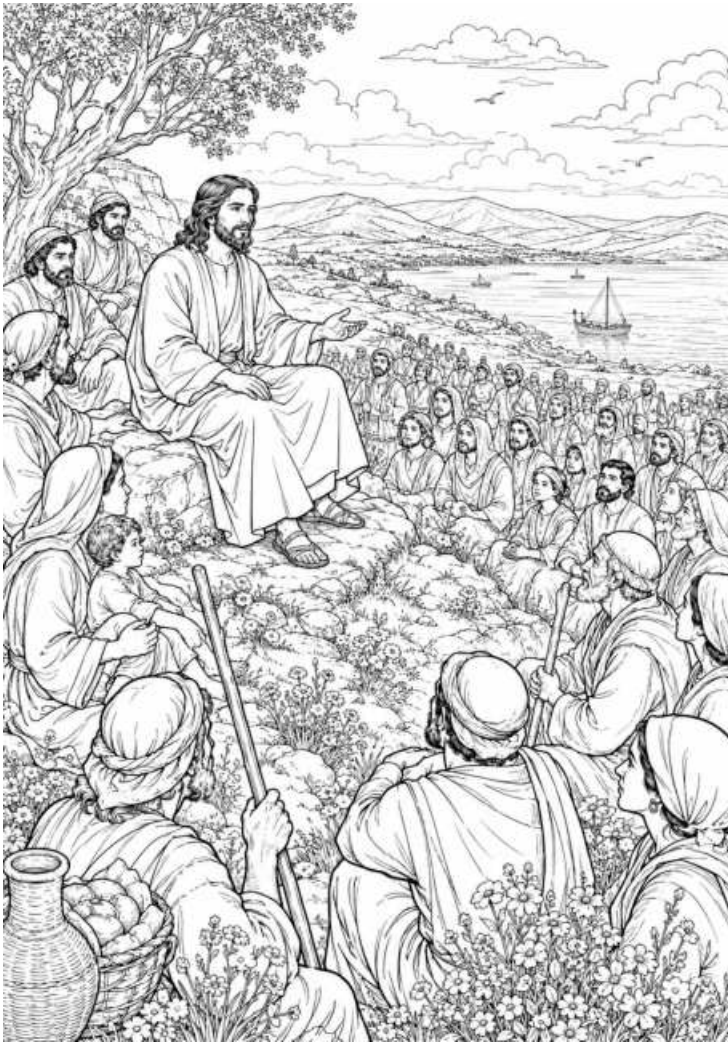
Where might I be asking Jesus to bless my plans instead of

allowing Him to reshape my heart?

What does this opening scene reveal to me about the patience and kindness of God?

What would it look like for me to "come near" to Jesus this week?

Which part of my life needs to become quiet enough to hear His voice?



2

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

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Scripture
"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven."
 Matthew 5:3, KJV
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When Jesus Spoke

Jesus began with a blessing.

That alone is worth pausing over.

He did not begin His sermon with a demand, a warning, or a rebuke. He began with the word **blessed**. Before He spoke of anger, purity, prayer, forgiveness, anxiety, judgement, or obedience, He opened His mouth and announced that the kingdom of heaven was already reaching toward the least expected people.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

To many in the crowd, these words must have sounded strange.

They had come expecting the language of power. Many hoped the Messiah would speak of victory over Rome, honour for Israel, and the restoration of national greatness. But Jesus did not begin with the strong, the influential, or the outwardly successful.

He began with the spiritually poor.

He began with those who knew they had nothing to bring.

He began with the person who could no longer pretend to be whole.

The first doorway into the kingdom is not achievement. It is need.

Understanding the Setting

The crowd gathered around Jesus carried many expectations. Some were poor labourers and fishermen. Some were sick and desperate. Some were religious observers. Some were disciples still learning what kind of kingdom Jesus had come to reveal.

Matthew tells us that Jesus had already been preaching, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He had called fishermen to follow Him, healed the sick, and drawn great multitudes from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond Jordan.

The atmosphere was full of anticipation.

Many hoped the kingdom would mean outward deliverance. They imagined political freedom, material comfort, and national honour. Yet Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount by turning their expectations upside down.

The kingdom would not begin with pride, self-confidence, or superiority.

It would begin with poverty of spirit.

In *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, Ellen G. White notes

that Christ's first words did not flatter the pride or feed the ambitions of the crowd. Instead, His words reached those who sensed their spiritual need.

This is the setting of the first Beatitude: a crowd expecting greatness, and Jesus blessing humility.

Understanding the Teaching

To be poor in spirit is not the same as being financially poor.

A person may have little money and still be proud. Another may have wealth and still know their deep need of God. Jesus is speaking about the inner posture of the soul.

The poor in spirit are those who know they cannot save themselves.

They have stopped pretending.

They no longer trust in their religious performance, their moral record, their knowledge, their reputation, or their own strength. They do not come to God saying, "Look at what I have done." They come saying, "Lord, have mercy on me."

This poverty is not despair. It is honesty.

It is the moment when the human heart sees itself truthfully before the holiness and mercy of God. It is Peter falling at the feet of Jesus and saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." It is the publican who would not lift his eyes to heaven, but prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

The poor in spirit are not blessed because their poverty is beautiful in itself. They are blessed because their emptiness makes room for grace.

Pride cannot receive what it does not think it needs.

Self-sufficiency closes the heart.

Spiritual poverty opens it.

Jesus says that to such people belongs "the kingdom of heaven." Not because they have earned it, but because they are finally ready to receive it.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This verse reveals a God who does not despise need.

That is one of the most comforting truths in Scripture.

Human society often honours the confident, capable, impressive, and self-assured. We reward those who appear strong. We hide weakness. We polish our image. We learn to speak as though we are in control, even when the soul is tired, afraid, and uncertain.

But Jesus begins His kingdom with the poor in spirit.

This tells us something beautiful about the Father.

God is not waiting for us to become impressive before He welcomes us. He is not looking for spiritual actors who know how to perform holiness in public. He is looking for hearts honest enough to receive mercy.

The poor in spirit discover that God's grace is not given as a reward for self-confidence. It is given to those who come empty-handed.

In this Beatitude, Jesus reveals the Father as merciful, patient, and near to the humble. He does not crush the soul that has already become aware of its need. He blesses it. He does not turn away the one who confesses poverty. He opens the kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who know they need the King.

Looking Within

This Beatitude asks a difficult question:

Do I still believe I have something to prove before God?

It is possible to be religious and not poor in spirit. It is possible to read Scripture, pray, attend church, serve others, and still quietly trust in oneself. The human heart can turn even good things into evidence of superiority.

Poor in spirit does not mean we deny the work God has done in us. It means we never confuse His work with our worthiness.

We come to God because Christ is worthy, not because we are.

This truth frees us from both pride and despair.

Pride says, "I do not need grace."

Despair says, "Grace could never be enough for me."

The gospel answers both.

To the proud, Jesus says, "Become poor in spirit."

To the despairing, He says, "The kingdom of heaven is open to you."

This is not an invitation to hate ourselves. It is an invitation to stop hiding. God already knows the truth about us, and He still calls us to come.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites you to lay down the burden of spiritual performance.

You do not need to impress Him.

You do not need to pretend that you are stronger than you are.

You do not need to arrive with a polished heart, a perfect record, or a convincing explanation for every failure.

Come honestly.

Come empty.

Come aware of your need.

The first blessing of the Sermon on the Mount is not for those who have mastered the spiritual life. It is for those who know they cannot live it apart from Christ.

Today, Jesus invites you to pray the simplest prayer of the poor in spirit:

"Lord, I need You."

That prayer may feel small.

But in the kingdom of heaven, it is the beginning of blessing.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

I come to You with empty hands. I confess that I cannot save myself, change myself, or make myself righteous apart from Your grace.

Forgive me for the pride that hides my need. Forgive me for the self-reliance that keeps me from depending fully on Christ.

Teach me what it means to be poor in spirit. Help me to stop pretending before You. Give me the honesty to confess my need and the faith to receive Your mercy.

Thank You that Jesus blesses the humble, welcomes the needy, and opens the kingdom to those who come by grace.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Journal Notes

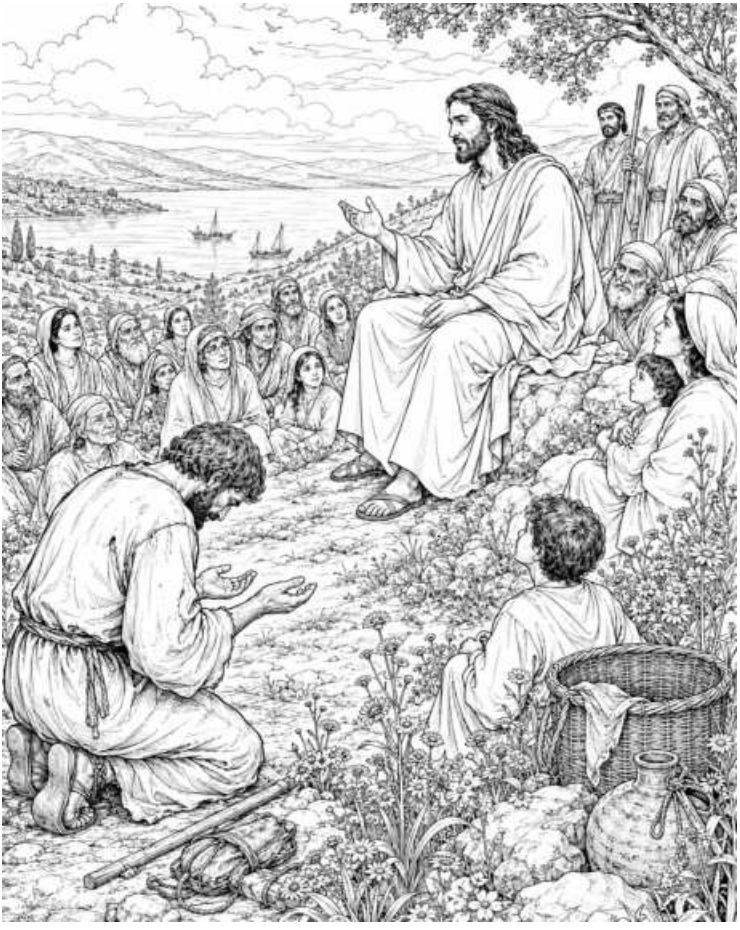
Where do I most often try to appear spiritually stronger than I am?

What am I tempted to rely on instead of the grace of Christ?

How does this Beatitude change the way I see God's attitude toward my weakness?

What would honest spiritual poverty look like in my prayers this week?

Where is Jesus inviting me to stop pretending and come to Him as I truly am?



3

Blessed Are Those Who Morn

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Scripture
"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be
comforted."
 Matthew 5:4
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When Jesus Spoke

There are some words that only Jesus could speak.

Many people try to comfort by minimising pain.

"It will pass."

"It could be worse."

"Try not to think about it."

"Stay strong."

Sometimes those words are kindly meant, but they often leave the wounded heart alone with its grief. They ask the mourner to move quickly past the sorrow. They suggest that pain is something to hide, hurry through, or quietly survive.

Jesus does something different.

He does not look at the grieving and tell them to stop mourning. He does not shame their tears. He does not treat sorrow as weakness. Sitting on the mountainside, surrounded by ordinary people carrying ordinary burdens, He says:

"Blessed are they that mourn."

It must have sounded strange.

The people gathered before Him knew sorrow well. Some mourned poverty. Some mourned sickness. Some mourned disappointment. Some mourned the heavy weight of Roman oppression. Some mourned private sins they could not forget. Some mourned loved ones who were no longer beside them.

Jesus saw them all.

He saw the grief hidden behind quiet faces. He saw the guilt that had never been confessed. He saw the sorrow that had no language. He saw the homes where hope had grown thin. He saw the hearts that had learned to keep going while breaking inside.

And to such people He spoke a blessing.

Not because sorrow itself is good.

But because sorrow, when brought to God, can become a doorway to comfort.

Understanding the Setting

The Beatitudes do not describe the world's idea of the blessed life.

The world often calls the cheerful blessed, the successful blessed, the powerful blessed, the comfortable blessed. Jesus begins elsewhere. He blesses those who know their need. He blesses those who are poor in spirit. Then He blesses those who

mourn.

This order matters.

Before a person can truly mourn before God, they must first recognise their poverty of spirit. They must stop pretending that all is well. They must admit that they cannot heal themselves, cleanse themselves, or carry themselves into the kingdom of heaven.

The mourning Jesus speaks of is deeper than sadness over difficult circumstances. It includes sorrow over sin. It is the grief of a heart that begins to see itself honestly in the light of God's holiness and love.

This is not the sorrow of despair.

It is not the sorrow that runs from God.

It is the sorrow that turns toward Him.

The crowd on the mountain would have understood public mourning. In Jewish life, grief was often visible. People wept aloud. They tore garments. They wore sackcloth. They sat in ashes. Sorrow was not always hidden away as it often is today.

Yet Jesus was not blessing outward displays of grief. He was speaking to the inner condition of the heart. He was describing the person who no longer excuses sin, no longer hides pain, and no longer tries to appear whole before God.

The mourner in this Beatitude stands before God without defence.

And there, surprisingly, he finds comfort.

Understanding the Teaching

"Blessed are they that mourn" does not mean that every kind of sorrow is blessed.

Some sorrow turns bitter.

Some sorrow becomes self-pity.

Some sorrow hardens into resentment.

Some sorrow leads a person away from God rather than toward Him.

The mourning Jesus blesses is sorrow opened to God.

It is the sorrow of repentance.

A person may regret sin because of its consequences. They may regret being caught. They may regret the damage done to their name, their relationships, or their peace. But repentance goes deeper than regret. Repentance grieves sin because sin wounds love.

It sees that sin is not merely a broken rule.

It is a broken relationship.

To mourn in this way is to begin seeing sin in the light of the cross. There we discover that our choices are not small things. Our pride, resentment, selfishness, dishonesty, impurity, indifference, and unbelief are not harmless private matters. They are part of the very burden Christ came to bear.

Yet Jesus does not reveal sin in order to crush the sinner.

He reveals sin so that He may heal.

This is why the promise follows immediately:

"for they shall be comforted."

God's comfort is not shallow reassurance. It is not sentimental language placed over an unchanged life. The comfort of God includes forgiveness, cleansing, restoration, and the presence of Christ with the wounded heart.

There is also comfort for those who mourn because life has wounded them.

Jesus does not ignore the grief of bereavement, disappointment, illness, loneliness, betrayal, or fear. He knows that human life in a fallen world carries real pain. He does not ask His people

to pretend that sorrow is not sorrow.

But He does promise that sorrow need not have the final word.

The comfort Jesus gives is not always the removal of pain. Sometimes it is His presence within it. Sometimes it is the quiet assurance that the Father has not forgotten. Sometimes it is the grace to endure one more day. Sometimes it is the deepening of faith through tears.

The blessing is not that mourners are spared all sorrow.

The blessing is that mourners are not left alone.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This Beatitude reveals a God who comes close to sorrow.

That is not how many people imagine Him.

Some imagine God as distant from human pain. Others imagine Him as stern, watching for failure. Some imagine Him as disappointed, reluctant to forgive, slow to comfort, and difficult to approach.

Jesus shows us the Father differently.

He reveals a God who draws near to the broken-hearted. A God who sees tears. A God who does not despise repentance. A God who would rather heal than condemn. A God who is not embarrassed by human weakness.

When Jesus says, "they shall be comforted," He is revealing the Father's heart.

God does not expose sin because He enjoys accusation. He exposes sin because He loves truth, and because only truth can lead us into freedom. He does not allow sorrow because He is careless with His children. He meets them in sorrow, works within it, and turns even grief into a place where grace can be received.

This is one of the great wonders of the gospel:

The same God who is holy enough to show us our sin is merciful enough to forgive it.

The same God who lets us feel our need is gracious enough to meet it.

The same God who allows tears also promises comfort.

Jesus Himself is the clearest evidence of this. He did not stand far from the sorrow of the world. He entered it. He wept at a tomb. He carried rejection. He bore shame. He suffered injustice. He became acquainted with grief.

God's comfort is not theoretical.

It has a face.

It is found in Christ.

Looking Within

This Beatitude asks us to consider what we do with sorrow.

Do we bring it to God, or do we bury it?

Do we allow sorrow for sin to lead us to repentance, or do we excuse what God is gently asking us to surrender?

Do we let grief soften us, or do we allow it to make us hard?

Many people avoid mourning because they fear what they may find beneath the surface. Silence feels safer. Busyness feels easier. Religious routine can even become a way of avoiding honest sorrow before God.

But Jesus blesses the one who stops hiding.

There is a kind of spiritual health that begins only when we become honest before God. Honest about sin. Honest about pain. Honest about disappointment. Honest about the places where our hearts have grown tired.

The question is not whether we have sorrow.

The question is where we take it.

A heart that mourns before God is not faithless. It is often the heart closest to healing.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites you to bring Him the sorrow you have been carrying.

Not the edited version.

Not the acceptable version.

Not the version you think a stronger Christian should have.

The real sorrow.

If it is sorrow over sin, bring it to Him. Do not cover it with excuses. Do not try to repair yourself before coming. Come honestly. The Saviour who reveals sin also forgives sin.

If it is sorrow over loss, bring it to Him. He does not despise your tears. He does not rush your grief. He is near to the brokenhearted.

If it is sorrow over the condition of the world, bring it to Him. Let your mourning become compassion, prayer, and faithful service.

If it is sorrow you cannot explain, bring that too.

Jesus does not say, "Blessed are those who understand all their pain."

He says, "Blessed are they that mourn."

The promise is simple and strong:

"They shall be comforted."

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for meeting me in the places where I am most honest and most broken.

Teach me not to hide my sorrow from You. Give me a heart that mourns over sin without falling into despair. Help me to see the cross clearly, so that I may understand both the seriousness of sin and the greatness of Your mercy.

Comfort me where life has wounded me. Draw near to the places I do not know how to heal. Let my grief soften my heart instead of hardening it. Let my tears lead me closer to Jesus.

Thank You that You do not leave mourners alone.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Journal Notes

What sorrow have I been carrying that I have not honestly brought before God?

Is there any sin in my life that I have excused, hidden, or minimised instead of mourning before God?

How does the promise "they shall be comforted" change the way I understand God's heart?

Where have I experienced God's comfort in a painful season?

Who around me may need the comfort of Christ through my words, presence, or prayer?



4

Blessed Are The Meek

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Scripture
"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the
earth."
 Matthew 5:5
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When Jesus Spoke

The people gathered on the mountainside had come with many hopes.

Some hoped Jesus would speak of freedom from Rome.

Some hoped He would announce a kingdom of power.

Some hoped He would promise honour, comfort, land, and victory.

They lived under foreign rule. They knew poverty. They knew political tension. They knew what it meant to be overlooked by the powerful and governed by those who did not love them.

So when Jesus spoke of inheritance, many ears would have

listened carefully.

But once again, His words did not follow the expectations of the crowd.

He did not say, "Blessed are the forceful."

He did not say, "Blessed are the ambitious."

He did not say, "Blessed are those who know how to take what belongs to them."

He said:

"Blessed are the meek."

To many, meekness may have sounded like weakness. It may still sound that way today. We often think of meek people as those who are easily pushed aside, afraid to speak, or unable to defend themselves.

But Jesus was not blessing fearfulness.

He was not praising passivity.

He was not calling His people to become silent victims of evil.

Jesus was revealing the spirit of His kingdom.

The kingdom of God does not grow from pride, violence, self-promotion, or control. It grows in the heart that has surrendered itself to God. The meek person is not weak because they have no strength. The meek person is blessed because their strength is no longer ruled by self.

Understanding the Setting

In the world of Jesus' hearers, land mattered deeply.

To inherit the earth was not a small promise. For Israel, the land was tied to covenant, belonging, promise, identity, and hope. The Old Testament had spoken of the meek inheriting the land: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psalm 37:11).

That promise came in a world where the wicked often seemed to prosper. The aggressive gained ground. The proud appeared secure. The violent seemed to shape history.

Yet Scripture taught that God saw beyond the surface of human power. The future did not belong to those who seized control. It belonged to those who trusted Him.

Jesus now takes that ancient promise and places it at the heart of His kingdom.

The meek are not those whom the world naturally rewards. They are those whom God recognises. They may not always win arguments. They may not dominate rooms. They may not build their lives around status, visibility, and self-defence.

But they belong to the King.

And because they belong to Him, the inheritance is secure.

Understanding the Teaching

Meekness begins where spiritual poverty and godly mourning have already done their work.

The first Beatitude showed us our need: "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

The second showed us our sorrow over sin: "Blessed are they that mourn."

Now the third shows us what happens when the heart stops defending itself before God.

The meek person has been humbled by grace.

They no longer need to pretend to be whole. They no longer need to prove their worth by winning every conflict. They no longer need to place themselves at the centre of every story.

This does not mean they have no convictions.

Jesus was meek, but He was never morally weak. He spoke

truth to religious leaders. He cleansed the temple. He confronted hypocrisy. He defended the wounded. He stood silent before false accusation when silence honoured the Father more than self-defence.

His meekness was not the absence of strength.

It was strength surrendered to the will of God.

Ellen White describes the meekness of Christ as the fruit of self-denial and communion with the Father. She writes that Jesus walked among humanity "not as a king, to demand homage, but as one whose mission it was to serve others."

That is the heart of meekness.

Meekness is not thinking that we have no value.

It is knowing that our value does not need to be defended through pride.

Meekness is not refusing to act.

It is acting from love rather than from wounded self-interest.

Meekness is not avoiding conflict at all costs.

It is refusing to let resentment, revenge, and ego govern the soul.

The meek person has learned to place the self under God.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This Beatitude reveals a beautiful truth about God: He is not impressed by the pride that impresses the world.

God does not measure greatness by dominance.

He does not honour the loudest voice simply because it is loud.

He does not confuse spiritual authority with human force.

In Jesus, we see that God's heart is humble.

This is difficult for the human mind to grasp. We often imagine power as distance, control, and superiority. But when

God revealed Himself in Christ, He came near. He touched the unclean. He ate with sinners. He welcomed children. He washed feet. He carried a cross.

The meekness of Jesus reveals that God's greatness is not insecure. He does not need to crush the weak in order to prove that He is strong.

He bends toward them.

This means we can come to Him without fear. We do not need to perform spiritual confidence in His presence. We do not need to hide our need beneath religious language. We do not need to fight for attention before the Father.

The meekness of Christ tells us that God is safe for the humbled soul.

He does not despise the person who has been brought low.

He does not reject the one who has run out of self-confidence.

He does not turn away the heart that says, "Lord, teach me. Lead me. Govern me."

The proud heart sees surrender as loss.

But Jesus shows us that surrender to God is the doorway to peace.

Looking Within

Meekness asks honest questions of the heart.

What happens inside me when I am corrected?

What rises in me when someone overlooks me?

How do I respond when I am misunderstood?

Do I need to win every argument?

Do I secretly measure my worth by whether others recognise me?

These questions are not meant to condemn us. They help us

see where self still rules.

Much of our unrest comes from the constant defence of self. We defend our image. We defend our opinions. We defend our importance. We defend our version of events. We defend the place we think we deserve.

And sometimes, even in religious life, self remains alive beneath spiritual language.

We may want to serve, but only if we are noticed.

We may want to speak truth, but with a hidden desire to defeat.

We may want righteousness, but without humility.

We may want God's kingdom, but still want our own throne.

Jesus gently exposes this.

He does not do so to shame us. He does so to free us.

Because the self-centred life is exhausting.

Ellen White writes, "It is the love of self that destroys our peace." That sentence reaches deeply into ordinary life. Many conflicts in homes, churches, friendships, and communities are kept alive by the wounded self. We replay offences. We defend our pride. We answer sharply. We withdraw affection. We rehearse what we should have said.

But Jesus offers another way.

"Learn of me," He says elsewhere, "for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:29).

Meekness is not only a duty.

It is rest.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to stop fighting for the false kingdom of self.

This does not mean we stop caring about truth. It does not mean we allow evil to go unnamed. It does not mean we lose

courage.

It means we allow God to rule our spirit.

The meek person can speak truth without cruelty.

The meek person can suffer wrong without becoming bitter.

The meek person can serve without needing applause.

The meek person can wait because they trust the Father's timing.

The meek person can release revenge because they believe God judges rightly.

Jesus does not call us to manufacture this meekness by effort alone.

He calls us to Himself.

The meekness He blesses is learned in His presence. We receive it by beholding Him, by listening to Him, by surrendering our will to Him, and by allowing His Spirit to form His character within us.

The promise is remarkable:

"They shall inherit the earth."

The world often belongs, for a season, to those who take.

But the future belongs to those who trust.

The proud may grasp, but the meek will inherit.

In the kingdom of God, nothing surrendered to the Father is truly lost. The person who yields self to Christ does not become less human. They become whole. They are freed from the anxious burden of self-rule and brought into the peace of God's reign.

Jesus is inviting us today:

Come down from the throne of self.

Lay down the need to prove yourself.

Let Me teach you My meekness.

Trust the Father with your name, your wounds, your future,

and your inheritance.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Teach me the meekness of Jesus.

I confess that my heart often wants to defend itself, exalt itself, and protect itself. I can be quick to speak, slow to listen, and unwilling to yield. I can mistake pride for strength and self-defence for wisdom.

Please forgive me.

Show me the beauty of Christ, who was strong enough to serve, holy enough to be gentle, and secure enough to surrender fully to Your will.

Make my heart quiet before You.

Make my words kinder.

Make my spirit teachable.

Make my strength obedient to love.

Help me to trust that I do not need to grasp what You have promised to give. Let me live as one who belongs to Your kingdom.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Journal Notes

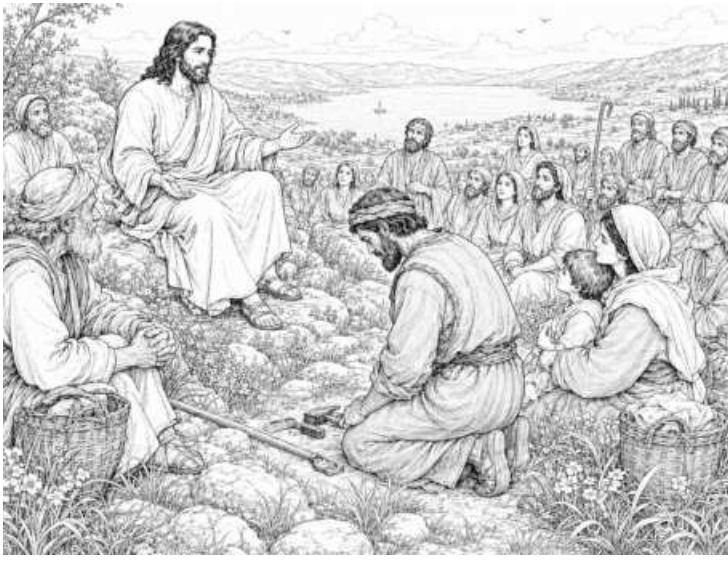
Where do I most often struggle to show meekness: in my words, my reactions, my relationships, or my private thoughts?

When I feel overlooked or misunderstood, what does my response reveal about my heart?

What would it look like for me to surrender my need for self-defence to Jesus this week?

How does the meekness of Christ change the way I understand God's character?

What promise in Matthew 5:5 do I need to hold onto today?



5

Blessed Are Those Who Hungers and Thirst for Righteousness

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Scripture
"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after
righteousness: for they shall be filled."
 Matthew 5:6
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When Jesus Spoke

The people sitting on the mountainside knew hunger.

Many of them lived close to the edge of need. Bread was not taken for granted. Water was not a luxury. A dry season, a failed crop, an unfair tax, or a day without work could press heavily upon a family. Hunger was not an idea to them. Thirst was not a metaphor first. It was bodily, immediate, and difficult to ignore.

Then Jesus spoke of another kind of hunger.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness."

He did not say, Blessed are those who casually admire righteousness. He did not say, Blessed are those who occasionally think about becoming better. He spoke of hunger and thirst: deep desire, urgent need, longing that cannot be satisfied by anything else.

The poor in spirit have seen their need. Those who mourn have grieved over sin. The meek have surrendered the rule of self. Now Jesus describes the soul that longs to be made right with God.

This is not the hunger of pride wanting to appear holy.

It is the hunger of a heart that has discovered that nothing less than God Himself can satisfy.

Understanding the Setting

The Beatitudes unfold like a path of spiritual awakening. First, the soul recognises its poverty before God. Then it mourns over sin. Then it learns meekness from Christ. Now it begins to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

In the religious world of Jesus' day, many people associated righteousness with visible religious performance. The scribes and Pharisees were regarded by many as models of religious seriousness. They knew the law. They observed outward forms. They were careful about public religious identity.

Yet Jesus was leading His hearers deeper than religious appearance.

He was not calling them merely to behave respectably. He was not asking them to build a public image of goodness. He was revealing a righteousness that reaches the heart, restores the person, and brings the life into harmony with God.

Ellen G. White summarises this righteousness as holiness,

likeness to God, and love. She explains that the righteousness of God is embodied in Christ, and that we receive righteousness by receiving Him.

This is central to the teaching.

Jesus does not bless those who are satisfied with themselves. He blesses those who know they need a righteousness they cannot manufacture.

Understanding the Teaching

To hunger and thirst after righteousness is to long for God to make the heart right.

Righteousness is not merely the absence of obvious wrongdoing. It is not only correct behaviour. It is the life of God shaping the life of the believer. It is love made visible. It is the character of Christ being formed within ordinary people.

This means righteousness is both a gift and a transformation.

It is a gift because no human being can create it by effort alone. We cannot produce holiness from an unchanged heart. We cannot wash ourselves clean by promising to try harder. We cannot satisfy the hunger of the soul with moral self-improvement.

But righteousness is also a transformation because Christ does not leave the hungry soul empty. He fills. He restores. He renews desire. He changes what we love, what we seek, what we grieve over, and what we live for.

That is why Jesus' promise is so strong:

"They shall be filled."

He does not say they may be filled. He does not say they might be filled if they prove worthy enough. The blessing rests on the desire awakened by God Himself. The soul that hungers for

righteousness is already being drawn by grace.

The world offers many substitutes for righteousness.

It offers success without holiness.

It offers reputation without purity.

It offers pleasure without peace.

It offers knowledge without surrender.

It offers religion without transformation.

But none of these can fill the soul.

Jesus alone can.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This Beatitude reveals a God who does not mock our need.

He does not show us righteousness merely to expose our failure. He reveals righteousness because He intends to give what He commands. The God who awakens hunger also provides bread. The God who awakens thirst also opens the fountain.

This matters deeply.

Many people carry a hidden fear that God demands what they do not have and then condemns them for not having it. But Jesus shows us a different picture of the Father. God does not stand at a distance, watching hungry souls collapse under the weight of spiritual need. He comes near in Christ.

He offers Himself.

In this Beatitude, righteousness is not presented as a cold standard hanging above the guilty. It is presented as a promise offered to the hungry.

God's heart is generous. He gives freely. He fills abundantly. He does not despise the soul that says, "Lord, I am not what I should be, but I want You. I want Your will. I want Your character. I want Your righteousness."

That longing is precious to Him.

A self-satisfied heart has no room to receive. A hungry heart opens. A thirsty heart comes to the water. A longing heart reaches for Christ.

And Christ does not turn such a heart away.

Looking Within

This Beatitude asks a searching question:

What am I truly hungry for?

Not what do I say I value.

Not what do I admire in other people.

Not what do I know is right.

What does my life show that I hunger for?

Some hungers are easy to recognise. We hunger for security, approval, comfort, influence, control, pleasure, relief, success, or recognition. These desires may not all be wrong in themselves, but they become dangerous when they become the ruling appetite of the soul.

A person can be religious and still hunger mostly for approval.

A person can speak about God and still thirst mostly for control.

A person can know Scripture and still be more eager to win an argument than to reflect the character of Christ.

Jesus gently brings us back to the central question: Do I want to be made right with God more than I want to be seen as right by others?

This is not a question meant to crush us. It is meant to awaken us.

If we find that our hunger is weak, we may bring even that weakness to Jesus. We may ask Him to deepen our desire. We

may ask Him to make us dissatisfied with shallow streams. We may ask Him to teach us to long for what truly gives life.

The blessing is not for those who already feel complete.

It is for those who know they are empty and come to Christ to be filled.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites you to bring your hunger honestly.

Do not pretend to be full.

Do not cover your thirst with religious language.

Do not settle for outward improvement when Christ is offering inward renewal.

Come to Him with the truth of your need. Come with your weak desires, your divided heart, your tired efforts, your repeated failures, and your longing to be different. Ask Him to make righteousness more precious to you than appearance, comfort, or self-rule.

He is not asking you to fill yourself before you come.

He is asking you to come because you are hungry.

And His promise remains:

You shall be filled.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

You know the true hunger of my heart.

You know where I have desired lesser things more than Your righteousness.

You know where I have settled for appearance instead of transformation.

Teach me to hunger and thirst for what is good, pure, and eternal.

Give me a deeper longing for the character of Jesus.

Empty me of self-satisfaction, and fill me with the life of Christ.

Let Your righteousness shape my thoughts, my motives, my words, and my relationships.

Do not allow me to be content with shallow religion.

Draw me nearer to You until my heart desires what You desire.

Thank You that You do not turn away hungry souls.

Thank You that in Jesus, righteousness is not only commanded, but given.

Amen.

Journal Notes

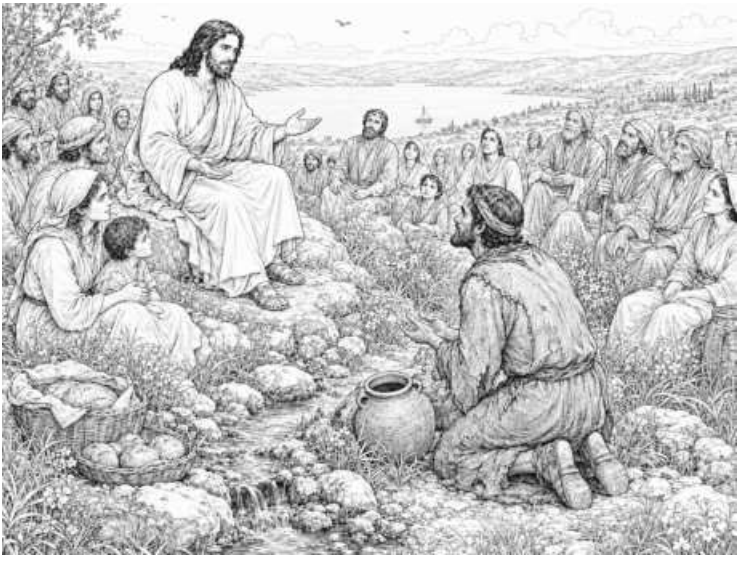
What does this passage reveal about God's willingness to satisfy the spiritually hungry?

What do my daily choices show that I hunger and thirst for most?

Where have I confused outward religious appearance with true righteousness?

What would it look like for me to seek Christ's righteousness more intentionally this week?

What prayer of desire do I need to bring honestly before God today?



6

Blessed Are the Merciful

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Scripture
"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain
mercy."
 Matthew 5:7, KJV
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When Jesus Spoke

When Jesus spoke these words, He was not praising ordinary kindness.

Many people can be kind when kindness costs little. Many can show sympathy when sympathy does not inconvenience them. Many can speak gently when they are already in a good mood.

But mercy is deeper than pleasant manners.

Mercy is love moving toward need.

Mercy is compassion that refuses to stand at a distance.

Mercy is the heart of God reaching toward the undeserving, the wounded, the guilty, the forgotten, and the difficult to love.

The crowd listening to Jesus knew what it meant to need mercy. Some were poor. Some were sick. Some carried shame. Some had been judged by religious leaders who saw their failure more clearly than their pain. Others had learned to survive by becoming hard. Life under Roman rule did not reward tenderness. Religious pride did not easily make room for compassion.

Then Jesus said:

"Blessed are the merciful."

Not the powerful.

Not the impressive.

Not those who could prove themselves better than others.

The merciful.

In that single sentence, Jesus revealed something essential about the kingdom of heaven: those who have truly received mercy become people through whom mercy flows.

Understanding the Setting

The Beatitudes are not isolated sayings. They form a pathway of spiritual life.

First, Jesus blesses the poor in spirit, those who know their need. Then He blesses those who mourn over sin and sorrow. Then He blesses the meek, those whose self-will has been softened before God. Then He blesses those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Now He speaks of mercy.

This order matters.

Mercy grows in the soil of grace. The person who knows their own poverty before God becomes less eager to condemn the poverty of others. The person who has mourned over their own

sin becomes slower to despise the brokenness of another. The person who has learned meekness becomes less interested in superiority. The person who hungers for righteousness begins to long not only to be made right, but to see others restored.

Mercy is not weakness. It is not pretending that sin does not matter. It is not calling wrong right. It is not allowing cruelty, abuse, or injustice to continue unchecked.

Biblical mercy sees the truth clearly, but it does not stop at accusation.

It asks, "How can this person be restored?"

It asks, "What would God's compassion look like here?"

It asks, "How has God treated me?"

Ellen White writes that mercy does not originate in the natural human heart, but comes through "the influence of the divine Spirit" moving upon the heart. She also describes God as "the source of all mercy" and says that He "seeks not to punish, but to redeem."

That is the setting of this Beatitude. Jesus is not merely teaching us how to behave toward others. He is revealing what happens when the mercy of God takes possession of the heart.

Understanding the Teaching

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

The promise is simple, but it searches deeply.

Jesus does not say that we earn God's mercy by being merciful. Mercy cannot be earned. If it could be earned, it would no longer be mercy.

Rather, Jesus is describing the life of those who belong to His kingdom. The merciful obtain mercy because they have already begun to understand the heart of the merciful God. They receive

mercy, and that mercy changes the way they see others.

Mercy has at least three movements.

First, mercy sees suffering.

It notices the person others ignore. It sees the loneliness behind a difficult attitude. It sees the fear behind harshness. It sees the wound beneath the failure. It does not reduce people to their worst moment.

Second, mercy moves toward need.

It does not remain a feeling. It becomes a word, a gesture, a visit, a meal, forgiveness, patience, protection, or practical help. In Matthew 25, Jesus later identifies acts of mercy toward the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and the imprisoned as service rendered to Him. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren," He says, "ye have done it unto me."

Third, mercy seeks restoration.

Mercy does not delight in punishment. It does not enjoy exposing people. It does not feed on another person's shame. When correction is needed, mercy corrects with grief rather than superiority. When truth must be spoken, mercy speaks it with the desire to heal rather than to humiliate.

This is why mercy is one of the clearest marks of Christ's kingdom.

The natural heart often asks, "Do they deserve it?"

The merciful heart asks a different question: "What has God given me that I can now give to them?"

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This Beatitude reveals the heart of God with unusual tenderness.

God is not reluctant to show mercy. Mercy is not something we must force from Him. It is not a small exception to His character.

Mercy belongs to who He is.

When God revealed His name to Moses, He declared Himself "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). Jesus now stands on the mountain as the perfect revelation of that same character.

In Christ, mercy has a face.

We see it when He touches the leper.

We see it when He eats with publicans and sinners.

We see it when He restores the ashamed.

We see it when He weeps with the grieving.

We see it when He prays for those who crucify Him.

God's mercy does not deny His holiness. It reveals the purpose of His holiness. God hates sin because sin destroys the people He loves. His mercy is not sentimental indulgence. It is His holy love reaching into human ruin to redeem what sin has damaged.

This means we may come to Him honestly.

We do not need to hide our need.

We do not need to pretend we are less broken than we are.

We do not need to make ourselves worthy before approaching Him.

The God revealed by Jesus is merciful.

He knows the full truth about us and still calls us to Himself. He does not excuse sin, but neither does He abandon sinners. He does not flatter the heart, but He heals it. He does not leave us in guilt, but invites us into forgiveness, restoration, and new life.

To rediscover mercy is to rediscover the heart of God.

Looking Within

This Beatitude asks us to examine how we respond to weakness, failure, and need in others.

It is possible to believe in mercy as a doctrine while withholding mercy in practice.

We may enjoy receiving grace from God while becoming impatient with those who need grace from us. We may ask God to understand our motives while judging others only by their actions. We may expect forgiveness quickly while offering forgiveness slowly. We may want God to be gentle with our wounds while being harsh with the wounds of another.

Jesus does not let us separate our relationship with God from our treatment of people.

The question is not merely, "Do I believe God is merciful?"

The question is also, "Is God's mercy changing me?"

A merciful heart does not become careless about right and wrong. It becomes careful about people.

It remembers that every person we meet is more than their behaviour. They are someone God made. Someone Christ died to save. Someone carrying burdens we may not see. Someone whose story is not yet finished.

This does not mean every relationship must be restored in the same way. Mercy does not require us to ignore danger, tolerate abuse, or remove wise boundaries. Sometimes mercy speaks firmly. Sometimes mercy steps back. Sometimes mercy refuses to enable destructive behaviour.

But even when mercy must be firm, it refuses hatred.

It does not seek revenge.

It does not rejoice in collapse.

It does not turn another person's failure into entertainment.

It does not forget how much it has received from God.

The merciful person lives with a softened memory: "I too have needed mercy."

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to receive mercy before we try to give it.

We cannot pour out what we have not received. A dry heart cannot refresh another thirsty soul. A heart still trying to earn God's favour will often become severe toward others. But a heart that has been met by Christ begins to change.

So the invitation is simple.

Come to Jesus with your need for mercy.

Bring Him the sin you are ashamed of.

Bring Him the hardness you cannot soften by yourself.

Bring Him the resentment you have carried too long.

Bring Him the person you find difficult to love.

Bring Him the memory that still makes mercy feel impossible.

Ask Him to make His mercy real in you.

Then ask Him to make His mercy visible through you.

Today, mercy may look like forgiving someone who has asked for forgiveness. It may look like praying for someone you have judged. It may look like helping someone who cannot repay you. It may look like speaking with gentleness when irritation feels easier. It may look like refusing to gossip. It may look like giving someone room to grow.

Jesus does not merely command mercy from a distance.

He gives what He commands.

The One who says, "Blessed are the merciful," is Himself merciful. And when He dwells in the heart, mercy becomes more than an ideal. It becomes the fragrance of His presence.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for being merciful and gracious. Thank You that You do not treat me according to my sins, but invite me to receive forgiveness, healing, and restoration through Jesus.

Teach me to understand Your mercy more deeply. Soften the parts of my heart that have become cold, impatient, or quick to judge. Help me to see people as You see them, not only through their failures, but through Your love and redeeming purpose.

Give me wisdom to show mercy without denying truth. Give me courage to forgive where forgiveness is needed. Give me discernment to keep healthy boundaries where they are needed. Let my words, choices, and attitudes reveal the mercy I have received from You.

Make me merciful because You have been merciful to me.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Journal Notes

Where in my life have I most clearly experienced the mercy of God?

Who do I find difficult to treat with mercy, and why?

Do I tend to confuse mercy with weakness, or truth with harshness?

What would mercy look like in one specific relationship this week?

How does Matthew 5:7 reveal the heart of God to me today?



7

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

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Scripture
"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see
God."
 Matthew 5:8
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When Jesus Spoke

When Jesus spoke these words, He was not standing in the temple courts surrounded by polished stone, incense, priests, and ritual washings.

He was seated on a mountainside.

Before Him were fishermen, labourers, mothers, the poor, the sick, the weary, and those who had come hoping for healing. Many of them knew what it felt like to be considered unclean by others. Some had been kept at a distance by religious systems that measured purity from the outside in.

Then Jesus said:

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

It was a quiet sentence, but it reached deeper than anything His listeners expected.

He did not say, "Blessed are those who appear clean."

He did not say, "Blessed are those who know how to avoid ceremonial defilement."

He did not say, "Blessed are those whose religion looks acceptable before men."

He spoke of the heart.

The place no one else can fully see.

The place where motives live.

The place where desire begins.

The place where worship is either true or divided.

The place where God wants to dwell.

Understanding the Setting

In the religious world of Jesus' day, purity was often associated with outward separation. There were washings, rules, boundaries, and careful concerns about ceremonial uncleanness. These things were not meaningless in themselves, but they could become dangerous when the outward form replaced the inward reality.

A person could wash the hands and still cherish pride.

A person could avoid contact with the ceremonially unclean and still carry contempt in the soul.

A person could appear religious in public and still be divided within.

Jesus was not rejecting holiness. He was restoring it to its true centre.

He was showing that purity is not first about what touches

the body, but about what shapes the soul. The kingdom of God begins deeper than appearance. It begins in the inner life. It begins in the heart.

Understanding the Teaching

Purity of heart is not merely the absence of obvious outward sin.

It is not simply moral respectability.

It is not a polished religious image.

To be pure in heart is to be sincere before God. It is to have an undivided inner life. It is to desire truth in the inward parts. It is to become the same person before God that we appear to be before others.

A pure heart is not a heart that has never struggled.

It is a heart that no longer wants to hide from God.

It is a heart that wants its motives cleansed, its desires reordered, and its vision restored.

Jesus then gives a remarkable promise:

"for they shall see God."

This promise points forward to the day when God's people will see Him face to face. But it also has meaning for the present. The pure in heart begin to recognise God more clearly now.

They see Him in Scripture.

They see Him in Christ.

They see His mercy in providence.

They see His patience in their own story.

They see His beauty where pride once saw only restriction.

They see His love where fear once imagined only severity.

Purity changes what we are able to perceive.

A selfish heart struggles to see a loving God. A proud heart struggles to see its need. A divided heart struggles to recognise

the beauty of holiness. But when the Holy Spirit purifies the heart, God is no longer seen as distant, harsh, or arbitrary. He is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This beatitude reveals that God is not satisfied with appearances because He desires relationship.

A religion of appearances may impress people, but it cannot heal the soul.

God does not merely want proper words, visible devotion, and outward correctness. He wants the heart. Not because He is harsh or demanding, but because the heart is where love, trust, surrender, and worship are born.

This shows us something deeply beautiful about God.

He is not looking for people who can successfully pretend to be whole.

He is calling people who are willing to be made clean.

The promise "they shall see God" also reveals His generosity. God does not hide Himself from those who sincerely seek Him. He reveals Himself to the humble, the honest, the teachable, and the childlike.

Purity, then, is not God's way of keeping people away from Him. It is His way of restoring their sight so that they may know Him more truly.

Looking Within

This blessing invites a searching but gentle question:

What is happening in my heart?

It is possible to do the right thing for the wrong reason.

It is possible to speak spiritual words while seeking approval.

It is possible to serve others while quietly feeding pride.

It is possible to avoid visible sins while tolerating hidden resentment, envy, bitterness, impurity, or self-seeking.

Jesus does not expose the heart to shame us. He reveals the heart so that He can heal it.

The question is not, "Have I already achieved perfect purity?"

The better question is:

Am I willing for Jesus to make my heart true before Him?

Purity of heart begins with honesty. It begins when we stop defending what God is trying to cleanse. It begins when we allow the Holy Spirit to show us not only what we do, but why we do it.

A divided heart says, "I want God, but I also want to keep this hidden thing."

A pure heart learns to pray, "Lord, I want You more than I want to hide."

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to bring the whole heart to Him.

Not only the respectable parts.

Not only the parts that look spiritual.

Not only the parts we are willing for others to see.

He invites us to bring the motives, fears, desires, memories, habits, and private struggles that shape the inner life.

He does not ask us to purify ourselves before coming to Him. He asks us to come so that He may purify us.

The pure in heart are not those who have made themselves clean by effort alone. They are those who allow Christ to dwell within them.

Today, Jesus invites you to stop performing and start surren-

dering.

To stop hiding and start trusting.

To stop settling for the appearance of religion and to receive the deeper work of grace.

The promise remains:

The heart made clean will see God.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Create in me a clean heart.

Do not allow me to be satisfied with outward religion while my inner life remains divided. Search my motives, my desires, my thoughts, and my hidden places. Show me what needs to be surrendered, but do it with the mercy of Jesus.

Teach me to love purity, not as a burden, but as the freedom of belonging wholly to You.

Help me to see You more clearly in Scripture, in Christ, in Your providence, and in the quiet work of grace within my life.

Make my heart true before You.

Amen.

Journal Notes

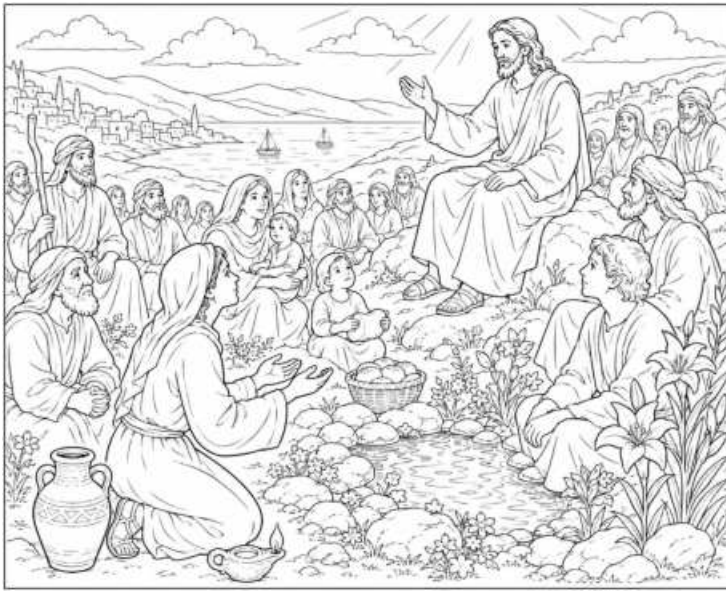
What does purity of heart mean to me after reading Matthew 5:8?

Where am I most tempted to focus on outward appearance rather than inward surrender?

Are there motives, desires, or attitudes I need to bring honestly before God?

How might a cleaner heart help me see God more clearly?

What is one practical response Jesus is inviting me to make today?



8

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Scripture

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

Matthew 5:9, KJV

When Jesus Spoke

The hillside was filled with people who knew conflict.

Some carried the quiet pain of family wounds. Some knew the strain of poverty. Some lived under Roman occupation. Some carried religious burdens placed upon them by leaders who often seemed more concerned with status than mercy. Around Jesus sat fishermen, labourers, mothers, the poor, the sick, the overlooked, and the restless.

Many longed for peace.

But many imagined peace would come when their enemies were removed, their nation was restored, and their suffering

was ended.

Then Jesus spoke:

"Blessed are the peacemakers."

He did not say, "Blessed are those who avoid conflict."

He did not say, "Blessed are those who pretend nothing is wrong."

He did not say, "Blessed are those who win every argument."

He blessed those who carry the peace of God into broken places.

Understanding the Setting

For the people listening to Jesus, peace was not an abstract idea. It was a deep longing.

Israel lived under foreign rule. Many hoped the Messiah would bring political freedom and national triumph. The word peace would have stirred hopes of safety, justice, restoration, and wholeness.

But Jesus was revealing a kingdom deeper than political victory. He was not forming rebels against Rome. He was forming children of God.

The peace He described begins with reconciliation to God. It moves inward, healing the divided heart. Then it moves outward, shaping how people speak, forgive, restore, and live with one another.

Ellen White writes that Christ is "the Prince of Peace," and that His mission is to restore the peace that sin has broken. She explains that those who receive the grace of Christ into the heart will have enmity subdued, strife calmed, and love awakened within them. White also connects peacemaking with the visible evidence that a person belongs to God's family.

Understanding the Teaching

A peacemaker is not merely a peaceful personality.

Some people dislike tension because it makes them uncomfortable. That may produce politeness, but it is not the same as peacemaking.

Biblical peacemaking is active. It enters the place where sin, fear, pride, anger, misunderstanding, and pain have disturbed what God intended. It seeks restoration without abandoning truth. It speaks gently without becoming dishonest. It forgives without calling evil good. It pursues reconciliation without pretending that wounds do not matter.

This is why peacemaking is costly.

To make peace, one must first receive peace.

The human heart cannot manufacture the peace Jesus blesses. We may create silence. We may manage appearances. We may keep distance. We may suppress anger for a time. But the peace of Christ is different. It is not merely the absence of noise. It is the presence of God's reconciling love.

Paul writes, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Peace begins when the sinner stops hiding from God and receives grace through Christ.

Only then can the heart become an instrument of peace.

The person who is at peace with God no longer needs to protect pride at all costs. They do not need to win every conversation. They do not need revenge to feel safe. They do not need to destroy another person to defend themselves.

They can move differently in the world because they belong to the Father.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This beatitude reveals that God is not merely interested in ending conflict. He is interested in restoring relationship.

Sin broke peace between humanity and God. It also broke peace within the human heart, between people, between nations, and even within creation itself.

But God did not respond to our rebellion with cold withdrawal.

He came near.

In Christ, God entered the conflict we caused. Jesus did not make peace by ignoring sin. He made peace by bearing its cost. At the cross, mercy and justice met. God did not pretend evil was harmless, yet He did not abandon the guilty. He opened a way for enemies to become children.

This is the heart of God.

He is a reconciling Father.

He does not delight in distance. He does not cherish division. He does not train His children to carry bitterness as a badge of loyalty. He calls them to reflect His own character in a divided world.

"Blessed are the peacemakers" means that God's children will carry something of the family likeness.

Where the Father forgives, they learn to forgive.

Where the Son reconciles, they learn to reconcile.

Where the Spirit softens hearts, they become gentle instruments in His hands.

The promise is deeply personal: "they shall be called the children of God."

Jesus is not saying that peacemaking earns our place in God's family. He is saying that peacemaking reveals the family resemblance. The child begins to look like the Father.

Looking Within

It is possible to love the idea of peace while resisting the work of peace.

We may want peace in our homes, but refuse to apologise.

We may want peace in the church, but continue to repeat stories that deepen suspicion.

We may want peace in our relationships, but keep rehearsing old injuries until they become part of our identity.

We may want peace with God, but still cling to the sin that keeps the heart divided.

Jesus invites us to look honestly at the kind of peace we seek.

Do we want the peace of Christ, or only relief from discomfort?

Do we seek reconciliation, or only the appearance of calm?

Do our words heal, or do they quietly keep wounds open?

Are there people we speak about, but refuse to speak to?

Have we mistaken avoidance for forgiveness?

Peacemaking begins when we allow God to search our own hearts first.

Sometimes the first act of peacemaking is confession.

Sometimes it is silence.

Sometimes it is a difficult conversation.

Sometimes it is refusing to pass on a damaging report.

Sometimes it is choosing prayer before reaction.

Sometimes it is making restitution.

Sometimes it is accepting that reconciliation requires truth, humility, time, and grace.

The peacemaker does not control the response of others. They cannot force repentance, trust, or restoration. But they can choose to carry the spirit of Christ into the situation.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites you to receive His peace before you try to give peace to others.

Come to Him with the conflict you carry.

Bring the anger that still rises too quickly. Bring the wound you keep revisiting. Bring the conversation you have avoided. Bring the relationship that feels too fragile to touch. Bring the bitterness you have justified because the other person really was wrong.

Jesus does not ask you to become false, weak, or passive.

He invites you to become like your Father.

A peacemaker is not someone who has never been hurt. A peacemaker is someone who has allowed the peace of Christ to become stronger than the instinct to wound in return.

Today, Jesus may not be asking you to solve every conflict.

He may simply be asking you to take the next faithful step.

Pray before you speak.

Speak truth without cruelty.

Ask forgiveness where you have caused harm.

Release the need to punish.

Refuse to feed division.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for sending Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Thank You that You did not leave us in the conflict our sin created, but came near to reconcile us to Yourself.

Please search my heart. Show me where pride, anger, fear,

or bitterness has disturbed Your peace within me. Teach me to receive the peace of Christ more deeply, so that I may carry it more faithfully.

Make me honest without being harsh. Make me gentle without being false. Make me courageous enough to seek reconciliation where it is possible, and humble enough to begin with my own heart.

Let my words, choices, and spirit reflect that I belong to You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Journal Notes

What does this passage reveal about God's desire for peace and reconciliation?

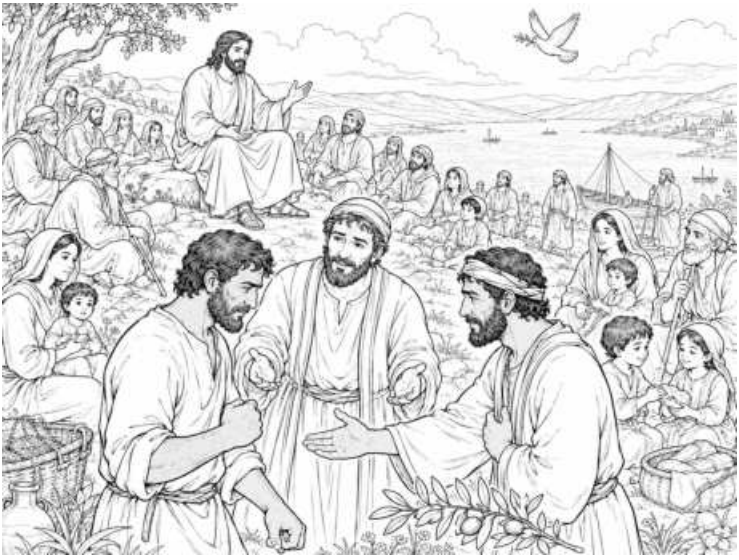
Where do I most need to receive the peace of Christ in my own heart?

Is there a relationship where God may be inviting me to take a faithful step toward peace?

Do my words usually calm conflict, deepen conflict, or avoid conflict?

What would it look like for me to reflect the family likeness of

my heavenly Father this week?



9

Blessed Are the Persecuted

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Scripture
Blessed are they which are persecuted for
righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven.
Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and
persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil
against you falsely, for my sake.
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your
reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets
which were before you.
Matthew –5:1012
```

When Jesus Spoke

The crowd on the mountainside had already heard blessings that turned the values of the world upside down.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are the meek.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are the pure in heart.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Each blessing had moved them deeper into the nature of God's kingdom. But now Jesus spoke a blessing that must have felt difficult to receive.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake."

This was not the promise many expected from the Messiah.

They longed for deliverance from oppression. They hoped for honour, restoration, freedom, and visible victory. Many expected the kingdom of God to remove suffering from their path. But Jesus did not promise His followers an easy life. He promised them His kingdom.

He did not say, "Blessed are those who never suffer."

He did not say, "Blessed are those who are always understood."

He did not say, "Blessed are those whose faith makes them popular."

He said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake."

This blessing is not about suffering in general. It is not about every insult, every disagreement, every consequence, or every hardship. Jesus is speaking about the cost that comes when a person belongs to God so deeply that their life begins to challenge the spirit of the world.

The persecuted are not blessed because people reject them.

They are blessed because they remain faithful to God when rejection comes.

Understanding the Setting

In the world of Jesus, persecution could be direct and dangerous. Prophets were rejected, imprisoned, mocked, beaten, and killed. John the Baptist had already stood before political and religious power with courageous truth. Jesus Himself would later be falsely accused, publicly shamed, mocked, beaten, and crucified.

The disciples would also come to know the cost of following Christ. Some would be imprisoned. Some would be beaten. Some would die for their witness. To follow Jesus was not merely to admire His teachings. It was to walk the same road of faithfulness in a world that often resists God's truth.

Yet Jesus' words are not locked in the ancient world.

Persecution changes its clothing from age to age.

In some places, it still looks like violence, imprisonment, and the loss of life. In other places, it is quieter. It may look like ridicule in a classroom, exclusion in a workplace, tension in a family, mockery online, social pressure, reputational damage, or the slow cost of refusing to compromise.

For many believers today, persecution may not come through prison doors or Roman crosses. It may come through subtle pressure to keep faith private, to soften conviction, to laugh along with what grieves God, to hide one's values, or to choose comfort over obedience.

A young person may be mocked for wanting to live with purity.

A professional may feel pressure to act dishonestly because "this is how business is done."

A family member may be dismissed as narrow-minded for holding to Scripture.

A believer may lose influence because they refuse to join gossip, corruption, cruelty, or moral compromise.

A Christian may be called hateful for trying to speak truth with love.

A disciple may be misunderstood simply because their life no longer moves with the same desires, loyalties, and ambitions as those around them.

This is why Jesus' words still matter.

The form of persecution may change.

The heart of it remains the same.

The world does not always oppose religion. Sometimes it welcomes religion that is comfortable, decorative, private, and harmless. What the world resists is righteousness that belongs to Christ.

It resists truth that cannot be bought.

It resists purity that exposes corruption.

It resists mercy that refuses hatred.

It resists peace that will not flatter sin.

It resists obedience that places God above approval.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus is careful with His words.

He does not say, "Blessed are those who are disliked."

He says, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake."

This distinction matters.

Not all opposition is persecution. Sometimes people suffer because they have been harsh, careless, proud, unwise, or needlessly offensive. Sometimes believers confuse the consequences of poor conduct with the suffering Jesus describes.

Christ does not bless arrogance.

He does not bless a combative spirit.

He does not bless rudeness dressed up as conviction.

He does not bless the desire to feel like a victim.

He blesses those who suffer because they are faithful to righteousness.

Righteousness is not merely being right in an argument. It is the life of God taking shape in the human heart. It is truth joined with love. It is holiness joined with humility. It is courage joined with gentleness. It is obedience joined with mercy.

Jesus expands the blessing in the next verse:

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

Here persecution includes words.

Reviling.

False accusation.

Misrepresentation.

Public shame.

This is deeply relevant today because reputations can be damaged quickly. A careless accusation can travel far. A person's motives can be misread. A faithful stand can be reduced to a cruel label. The pressure of being misunderstood can become heavy.

Jesus does not pretend this will be easy.

But He gives His followers a larger horizon.

"For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The first Beatitude and the last Beatitude share the same promise. The poor in spirit receive the kingdom. The persecuted for righteousness' sake receive the kingdom. This shows us that the whole life of discipleship begins and ends in dependence upon God.

The kingdom belongs to those who know they need grace.

The kingdom belongs to those who remain faithful when grace has made them different.

Jesus then says something even more surprising:

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad."

This does not mean persecution is pleasant. It does not mean pain should be denied. It does not mean believers must pretend that slander, rejection, and loss do not hurt.

Christian joy is not emotional pretending.

It is confidence in God.

The persecuted can rejoice because their suffering is not meaningless. They are not abandoned. They are not forgotten. They are not losing what matters most. Their reward is in heaven, and their lives stand in continuity with the prophets who were faithful before them.

They are walking the old road of God's witnesses.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This Beatitude reveals a God who does not abandon His people when faithfulness becomes costly.

God is not distant from the misunderstood.

He is not indifferent to the falsely accused.

He is not unaware of the believer who quietly loses favour because they chose obedience.

Jesus knows this path from the inside.

He was misunderstood by His own family. He was accused by religious leaders. He was rejected by the crowds. He was betrayed by a friend. He was condemned by unjust witnesses. He was mocked while suffering. He was crucified between criminals.

No one has ever suffered more innocently than Christ.

And yet, in Him, we do not see bitterness. We see love.

We do not see retaliation. We see surrender.

We do not see fear of human opinion. We see trust in the Father.

This is the heart of God: He enters the suffering of His people, not as a spectator, but as the Saviour who has gone before them.

God does not promise that faithfulness will always protect us from difficulty. He promises that difficulty will never separate us from Him.

The persecuted are blessed because God sees what others misread.

He sees the quiet obedience no one applauds.

He sees the private tears after public rejection.

He sees the employee who refuses dishonesty.

He sees the young believer who chooses purity while others laugh.

He sees the parent who keeps praying while the family misunderstands.

He sees the Christian who speaks gently when attacked.

He sees the disciple who chooses Christ when compromise would be easier.

The world may misname such people.

God calls them blessed.

Looking Within

This Beatitude asks us to examine our relationship with approval.

Many of us want to follow Jesus, but we also want to be understood by everyone. We want the kingdom of heaven, but we also want the comfort of belonging fully to the world around us. We want conviction, but not cost. We want discipleship, but not rejection.

Jesus gently brings us to the truth.

There will be moments when faithfulness costs us something.

It may cost a relationship.

It may cost an opportunity.

It may cost comfort.

It may cost reputation.

It may cost the easy silence that keeps everyone pleased.

This does not mean we should seek conflict. A Christian should never enjoy being opposed. We are called to be peacemakers, not provocateurs. But peacekeeping and faithfulness are not always the same thing. Sometimes peace with people is purchased by disobedience to God.

Jesus does not call us to be needlessly controversial.

He calls us to be faithful.

That faithfulness must be marked by His character. If we are persecuted, let it be because we resemble Christ, not because we have misrepresented Him. Let it be because we love righteousness, not because we love conflict. Let it be because we are faithful to truth, not because we are careless with people.

The question is not only, "Am I willing to suffer for Christ?"

The deeper question is, "Am I becoming the kind of person who suffers like Christ?"

With patience.

With courage.

With mercy.

With self-control.

With confidence in the Father.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to release the need to be approved by everyone.

He invites us to find our security in the kingdom of heaven rather than in public opinion. He invites us to stand with Him when righteousness becomes costly. He invites us to trust that no faithful obedience is wasted, even when it is misunderstood.

This invitation is practical.

Speak the truth, but do not use truth as a weapon.

Refuse compromise, but do not become proud.

Expect misunderstanding, but do not become bitter.

Accept the cost of obedience, but do not lose tenderness.

Do not seek persecution.

Do not fear it either.

Follow Jesus closely enough that when opposition comes, you are not alone in it. You are walking with the One who has already carried the cross.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for the words of Jesus.

Thank You that He does not hide the cost of discipleship from us. Thank You that He tells us the truth, and that His truth is filled with hope.

Teach me to follow Christ faithfully in a world that does not always understand Him. Keep me from pride, harshness, and a spirit of complaint. If I suffer, let it be for righteousness' sake and not because I have failed to reflect Your love.

Give me courage when obedience is costly.

Give me gentleness when I am misunderstood.

Give me patience when my motives are misread.

Give me joy that is rooted in Your kingdom and not in human approval.

Help me to remember that Jesus was rejected, yet He loved. He was falsely accused, yet He trusted You. He suffered, yet He remained faithful.

Make my life a quiet witness to Him.

Amen.

Journal Notes

Where do I feel the strongest pressure to hide or soften my faith?

Have I ever mistaken ordinary criticism or the consequences of my own actions for persecution?

What would it look like for me to stand for righteousness with the gentleness of Christ?

Whose approval am I most afraid of losing?

Where is Jesus inviting me to be faithful, even if it costs me comfort?

How can I respond to misunderstanding without becoming

bitter or defensive?

What promise from this passage do I need to hold onto this week?



II

Salt and Light

Those who receive the kingdom are called to reflect it. Jesus does not call His followers to hide from the world, but to live as preserving salt and visible light. Their lives are meant to reveal the Father's goodness in a dark and weary world.

10

Salt of the Earth

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Scripture
"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have
lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is
thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and
to be trodden under foot of men."
 Matthew 5:13
When Jesus Spoke
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Jesus had just finished speaking words of blessing over the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who suffer for righteousness' sake.

Then He turned to His disciples and said:

"Ye are the salt of the earth."

It was a simple image.

No one on the mountainside needed an explanation of salt. They used it in their homes. They tasted it in their food. They knew its value. Salt was ordinary, but it was not useless. It

was common, but it was powerful. It preserved. It seasoned. It entered what it touched.

Jesus did not say, "You may become the salt of the earth one day."

He said, "Ye are the salt of the earth."

This was not flattery. It was calling.

The people sitting before Him were not the powerful people of the Roman Empire. They were not the religious elite in Jerusalem. They were not the people most likely to appear important in history.

They were ordinary followers.

Yet Jesus entrusted them with a holy influence in the world.

Understanding the Setting

In the ancient world, salt was valuable because it preserved food from decay. Without modern refrigeration, salt helped slow corruption and made food usable for longer. It also gave flavour. A small amount could affect the whole meal.

When Jesus used this image, He was teaching His followers that the life of God within them was not meant to remain private, hidden, or disconnected from the world.

Salt must touch what it preserves.

It must be mixed into what it seasons.

It must come near.

Ellen White writes that salt "must be mingled with the substance to which it is added" and that, in the same way, people are reached through "personal contact and association."

This gives the image its force.

Jesus was not calling His disciples to withdraw from people in proud separation. He was calling them to live among people

with a different spirit.

Not a harsh spirit.

Not a superior spirit.

Not a condemning spirit.

But the preserving influence of Christlike love.

Understanding the Teaching

Salt represents influence.

Not influence built on status, noise, or public recognition, but the quiet power of a life shaped by Jesus.

A disciple's life should make something of God's goodness visible in the world. Where there is bitterness, the follower of Jesus should carry grace. Where there is decay, the follower of Jesus should carry truth. Where there is cruelty, the follower of Jesus should carry mercy. Where there is despair, the follower of Jesus should carry hope.

This does not mean Christians preserve the world through moral pride.

Salt loses its purpose when it loses its savour.

Jesus' warning is serious:

"but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?"

A person may still carry the name of religion while losing the life of Christ.

A church may still speak correct words while losing compassion.

A believer may still look active while becoming cold, proud, resentful, or self-protective.

The danger is not that salt stops looking like salt.

The danger is that it stops doing what salt was given to do.

The savour of the Christian life is the presence of Christ. It is love in the heart. It is righteousness in the life. It is mercy in action. It is truth without cruelty. It is conviction without self-righteousness. It is a life through which the Holy Spirit can reach others.

Without Christ, religious influence becomes empty.

With Christ, even an ordinary life becomes useful in the hand of God.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This teaching reveals that God does not save people merely for their own private comfort.

He blesses so that they may become a blessing.

The God revealed by Jesus is generous. He does not gather grace into one closed circle. He sends grace outward through human lives. He adopts sons and daughters, then makes them channels through which others may taste His goodness.

This is part of the heart of God.

He wants the world preserved from corruption.

He wants lonely people reached through personal kindness.

He wants wounded people touched through mercy.

He wants truth carried in a way that does not destroy tenderness.

He wants His children to live close enough to others that the love of Christ can be felt, not merely explained.

Salt does not announce itself loudly.

It simply changes what it enters.

So it is with the life of Christ in a surrendered person.

A gentle answer may preserve peace in a home.

A faithful act may preserve hope in a struggling friend.

A word of truth may preserve someone from a destructive path.

A quiet example may preserve faith in a child watching closely.

A life filled with Christ may preserve something good in places where the soul of the world is growing tired.

Looking Within

This chapter asks us to examine our influence.

Not only what we believe.

Not only what we say.

But what effect our lives are having on the people around us.

Do people experience more of Christ through my presence?

Does my life make goodness more believable?

Do my words preserve dignity, or do they wound carelessly?

Does my faith have savour, or has it become cold and mechanical?

It is possible to be religious and still lose tenderness.

It is possible to defend truth and still lose love.

It is possible to avoid obvious sin while becoming harsh, distant, and spiritually dry.

Jesus does not give this warning to discourage us. He gives it because influence matters. A life connected to Him can still become useful, even after seasons of weakness, failure, or dullness.

The question is not, "Am I impressive?"

The question is:

Is the life of Jesus still flowing through me?

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to receive again the savour of His presence.

He does not call us to manufacture spiritual usefulness by force of personality. He calls us to abide in Him.

The world does not need Christians who merely argue louder.

It needs disciples whose lives carry the flavour of grace.

It needs homes where Christ's patience is practised.

It needs workplaces where honesty is joined with kindness.

It needs churches where truth is not separated from love.

It needs ordinary believers who come close enough to others to bless them.

Today, Jesus invites you to let Him restore your influence.

Not through performance.

Not through religious display.

Not through anxious striving.

But through a renewed connection with Him.

When His love fills the heart, it will flow outward. When His righteousness shapes the life, it will preserve. When His Spirit works through ordinary contact with others, even small acts become part of God's saving work.

"You are the salt of the earth."

This is not a burden meant to crush you.

It is a calling meant to draw you closer to Christ, so that others may taste something of His goodness through your life.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for calling ordinary people to carry the influence of Your kingdom.

Forgive me for the times my life has lost the savour of Christ. Forgive me for the moments when I have spoken truth without love, lived faith without tenderness, or withdrawn from people You were calling me to bless.

Fill my heart again with the love of Jesus.

Let my life preserve what is good. Let my words carry grace. Let my presence bring peace, courage, honesty, and hope.

Use my ordinary life as a quiet witness to Your character.

May others taste Your goodness through the way I live.

Amen.

Journal Notes

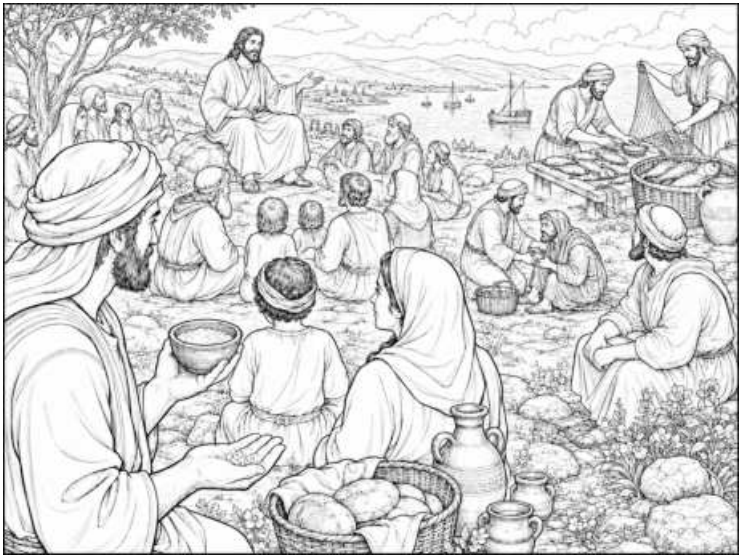
Where has God placed me to be "salt" in the lives of others?

What kind of influence do my words usually have on the people closest to me?

Where have I been tempted to withdraw from people instead of coming near with Christlike love?

Has my faith kept its savour, or have I become cold, harsh, or mechanical?

What is one practical way I can preserve goodness, peace, or hope in someone's life today?



11

Light of the World

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Scripture
Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on
an hill cannot be hid.
Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a
bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light
unto all that are in the house.
Let your light so shine before men, that they may see
your good works, and glorify your Father which is in
heaven.
Matthew —5:1416
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When Jesus Spoke

Morning had come over the Galilean hills.

The shadows that had rested in the valleys were beginning to withdraw. The sun rose over the land, touching the lake with gold. Villages stood out clearly on the hillsides. The small homes of ordinary people caught the light. Birds sang among the trees.

The world seemed to wake beneath the blessing of a new day.

Jesus looked at the crowd before Him.

They were not powerful people. Many were poor. Some were tired. Some had come with sickness, grief, questions, and hidden burdens. They were fishermen, mothers, labourers, elderly men, children, and people who knew what it meant to live unnoticed.

Yet Jesus looked at them and said something astonishing.

"Ye are the light of the world."

He did not say, "One day, when you are stronger, you may become light."

He did not say, "The educated, respected, and influential among you are the light."

He spoke to ordinary disciples who had begun to receive His words, His life, and His kingdom.

They were light because He was with them.

Understanding the Setting

Jesus used images His hearers could see.

They could see the morning sun spreading across the land. They could see towns and villages standing on the hills. They knew what it meant to light a small lamp in a simple one-room home. A lamp was not lit for decoration. It had a purpose. It was placed where it could give light to everyone in the house.

In a world without electric light, darkness was not a mild inconvenience. Darkness limited movement, work, safety, and sight. Light made life possible.

So when Jesus called His followers "the light of the world," He was not giving them a decorative identity. He was giving them a mission.

A hidden lamp helps no one.

A covered lamp defeats its own purpose.

A city on a hill cannot disappear into the landscape.

The life of a disciple was meant to be visible, not in pride, performance, or spiritual display, but in quiet faithfulness that helped others see the Father more clearly.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus had just said, "Ye are the salt of the earth." Salt works quietly. It preserves, penetrates, and gives savour.

Light also serves, but differently.

Light reveals.

Light guides.

Light exposes danger.

Light brings comfort.

Light helps people find their way.

Yet Scripture never teaches that human beings have light in themselves apart from God. Jesus is the true Light. John writes, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Whatever light shines through a disciple is received light.

A candle cannot kindle itself.

The moon has no brightness unless it reflects the sun.

The human heart has no saving light unless it turns toward Christ.

This protects us from pride. When good works are seen, the glory does not belong to the disciple. Jesus says that others should see those good works and "glorify your Father which is in heaven."

The purpose of Christian witness is not admiration.

It is revelation.

The question is not, "Do people notice me?"

The question is, "Do people see something of the Father's goodness, mercy, purity, and love through my life?"

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals a God who chooses to make Himself known through ordinary people.

God could have filled the world with constant displays of visible glory. He could have written His truth across the sky each morning. He could have revealed Himself through power alone.

Instead, He chooses human lives as channels of His light.

This is deeply humbling.

It means God does not merely save people from darkness. He also sends them back into the world as bearers of His light.

He places compassion in human hands.

He places truth on human lips.

He places mercy in human choices.

He places patience in homes, workplaces, churches, families, hospitals, schools, and communities.

The light of God is not only seen in sermons. It is seen when a believer refuses bitterness. It is seen when someone speaks truth without cruelty. It is seen when a Christian serves without needing applause. It is seen when forgiveness interrupts resentment. It is seen when faith steadies a home in crisis.

This is not self-manufactured goodness.

It is the life of Christ revealed in the character.

Ellen White wrote that no light shines upon fallen humanity except that which comes from Christ, and that His life in the soul, revealed through love in the character, makes His disciples

the light of the world.

This is the heart of God: He brings light to the world through Christ, and then He shares that light through those who abide in Him.

Looking Within

There is a false kind of visibility that seeks attention.

There is also a false kind of humility that hides obedience.

Jesus warns against both.

Later in the Sermon, He will warn His followers not to perform righteousness "to be seen of men" (Matthew 6:1). Here, however, He tells them to let their light shine before men.

The difference is motive.

One life says, "Look at me."

The other life says, "Look at the Father."

This asks something honest of us.

Are we hiding the light of Christ because we are afraid of being different?

Are we covering the lamp because faith feels too costly in public?

Are we visible in religious words, yet dim in mercy, patience, and love?

Are our good works pointing people toward God, or toward ourselves?

In today's world, light is needed in ordinary places. It is needed in family conversations, in business decisions, in messages, in how we speak about people who are not present, in how we treat those who cannot benefit us, and in how we respond when society grows cynical and harsh.

A disciple does not need to be loud to be light.

But a disciple cannot belong to Christ and remain deliberately hidden under the bushel of fear, compromise, or self-protection.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to stop trying to produce light apart from Him.

He does not call us to perform holiness in our own strength. He calls us to come near to Him, receive His life, and allow that life to shine.

The invitation is simple but searching:

Turn toward the Light.

Remain near the Light.

Let the Light be seen.

This may begin quietly. A word of kindness. A confession of wrong. A decision to forgive. A refusal to join gossip. A faithful act of service. A prayer offered for someone who is struggling. A life that becomes more honest, more gracious, more dependable, and more Christlike.

When Christ dwells in the heart, light does not need to be forced. It shines because He is present.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for sending Jesus, the true Light of the world.

I confess that I have no light apart from Him. Too often I have hidden my faith through fear, or shown myself instead of showing Your character.

Please draw me nearer to Christ.

Let His life shine through my words, my choices, my relationships, and my daily conduct. Remove pride from my witness.

Remove fear from my obedience. Make my life a quiet testimony to Your goodness.

May others see something of Your mercy, truth, and love through me, and may all glory return to You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Journal Notes

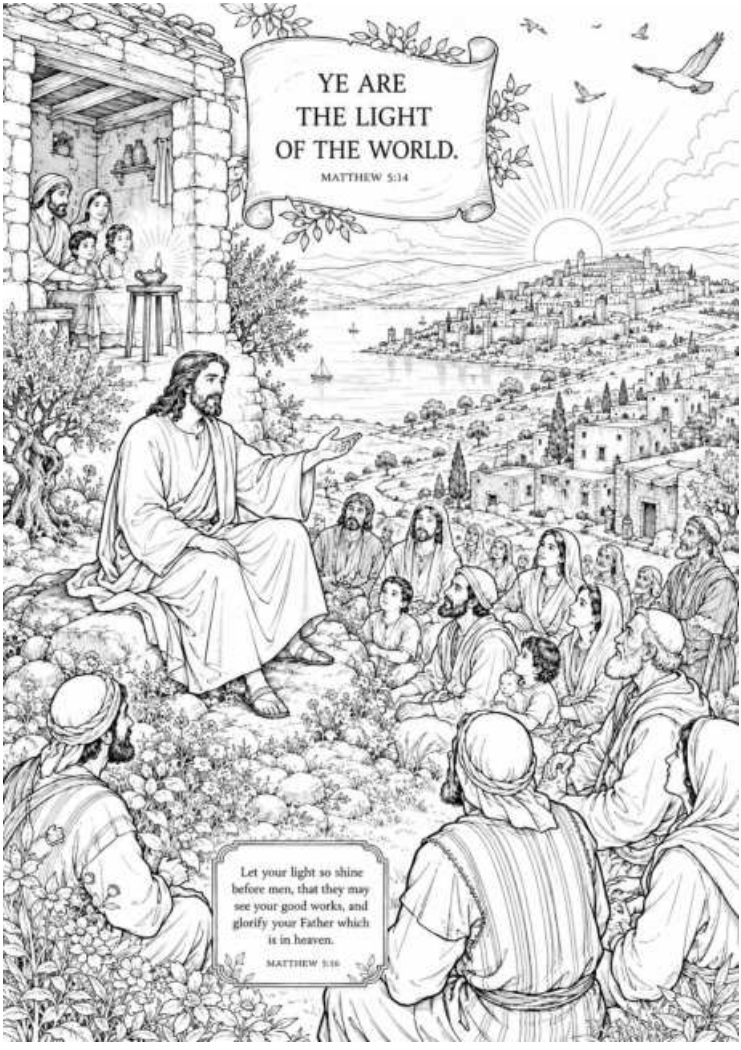
What does this passage show me about the kind of God the Father is?

Where do I most need the light of Christ in my own heart right now?

In what areas of my life have I been tempted to hide my faith?

What good works might God be inviting me to practise quietly and faithfully?

How can my words, habits, and relationships help others see the Father more clearly?


YE ARE
THE LIGHT
OF THE WORLD.
MATTHEW 5:14
Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.
MATTHEW 5:16

III

The Heart of the Law

Jesus reveals that God's law reaches deeper than outward behaviour. It searches anger, desire, truthfulness, retaliation, and love. In Christ's kingdom, righteousness is not performance before people, but a transformed heart before God.

12

The Fulfilment of the Law

Scripture
"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.
For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.
Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."
Matthew −5:1720, KJV

When Jesus Spoke

The hillside was quiet, but the words of Jesus carried the weight of Sinai.

He had just told His followers that they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He had called ordinary people to become a living witness to the character of God. But now He turned to a question many would have been asking silently.

What was He doing with the law?

Was this Teacher from Galilee replacing Moses? Was He setting aside the prophets? Was He loosening the commandments of God? Was He bringing a softer religion, one with less holiness and fewer demands?

Jesus answered before the accusation could take root.

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets."

He had not come to tear down what God had given.

He had come to reveal its deepest meaning.

He had come to fulfil it.

Understanding the Setting

For the Jewish people, the law was not a minor religious concern. It stood at the centre of their identity. It had been given through Moses. It shaped worship, morality, community, justice, family life, and covenant belonging.

Yet by the time of Jesus, much of the law had become surrounded by human traditions. Religious leaders had added layers of interpretation, rules, customs, and public expectations. Many people had come to measure righteousness by outward correctness.

They knew how to appear obedient.

They knew how to perform religion.

But Jesus saw beneath the surface.

On the mountain, He did not attack the law. He exposed the danger of misunderstanding it. The problem was not that God's law was too demanding. The problem was that many had reduced it to external behaviour while leaving the heart untouched.

Ellen G. White explains that the law given at Sinai was "the enunciation of the principle of love" and that Jesus, on the mount, was unfolding the same principles in words of tenderness and authority. He was not moving away from Sinai. He was revealing the love and holiness that had always stood behind it.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus says, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

To fulfil does not mean to cancel. It means to fill up, complete, embody, and bring to full expression.

Jesus fulfilled the law in several ways.

He fulfilled it by His life. Every commandment found perfect expression in Him. He loved God with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength. He loved His neighbour with perfect purity. He honoured the Father in thought, word, motive, and action.

He fulfilled it by His teaching. He showed that the law reaches deeper than outward conduct. Murder begins with hatred. Adultery begins with lust. Falsehood begins with a divided heart. Love does not stop at friends. It extends even to enemies.

He fulfilled it by His death. The sacrificial system pointed forward to Him. Every lamb, every altar, every priestly service found its fulfilment in Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

He fulfilled it by writing God's law upon the heart. The new covenant is not lawlessness. It is deeper obedience. It is God's will no longer merely written on stone, but written within a surrendered life.

This is why Jesus continues, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law."

A jot was among the smallest letters. A tittle was a tiny stroke of a letter. Jesus is saying that God's will is not careless, temporary, or negotiable. His law reflects His character. Because God does not change, the moral principles of His kingdom do not change.

But then Jesus says something startling.

"Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

To the crowd, this would have sounded impossible. The scribes and Pharisees were known for religious seriousness. They studied. They fasted. They prayed. They tithed. They guarded outward conduct.

Yet Jesus says that kingdom righteousness must exceed theirs.

Not by becoming more performative.

Not by adding more religious display.

Not by multiplying external rules.

The righteousness Jesus calls for is deeper because it begins in the heart. It is not merely the appearance of obedience. It is the life of God transforming the inner person.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals that God is not against obedience. He is against hollow obedience.

He is not satisfied with religious appearance while the heart remains proud, cold, resentful, impure, or self-protective. God desires truth in the inward parts. He wants the life to be healed from the inside out.

This shows us something beautiful about His character.

God's law is not arbitrary control. It is the shape of love.

His commandments are not barriers to joy. They are the boundaries of life. They protect what sin destroys. They reveal what love looks like when it becomes practical, embodied, and faithful.

Jesus does not lower the standard because He loves us.

He reveals the true standard because He loves us.

But He does not leave us alone beneath that standard. He fulfils what we could not fulfil. He forgives what we have broken. He gives what we do not possess. He brings the willing heart back into harmony with God.

The law shows us the beauty of God's character.

Jesus shows us that beauty in human form.

And grace makes that beauty possible in us.

Looking Within

It is possible to look obedient and still resist God.

It is possible to be correct in public and unconverted in private.

It is possible to defend truth with a spirit that does not resemble Christ.

That is the danger Jesus is addressing.

The scribes and Pharisees had a righteousness that could be seen by others. Jesus calls His followers to a righteousness that can be seen by God. A righteousness of motive. A righteousness of mercy. A righteousness of surrendered love.

This passage asks us to examine not only what we do, but why we do it.

Do I obey God because I trust His heart?

Do I keep His commandments while neglecting His character?

Do I measure spiritual growth by outward behaviour while avoiding inward surrender?

Do I want God to make me look righteous, or do I want Him to make me new?

Jesus is not inviting us into anxious rule-keeping. He is inviting us into a life where obedience becomes the fruit of love.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to stop choosing between law and grace.

He brings them together.

Grace does not make obedience irrelevant. Grace makes true obedience possible.

The invitation is to come to Him honestly. Not pretending. Not performing. Not defending ourselves. Not hiding behind religious knowledge. Simply coming as people who need a righteousness deeper than our own.

Jesus invites us to receive His life.

To let Him fulfil in us what we cannot produce by ourselves.

To let His love become the principle behind our actions.

To let His Spirit write the will of God upon our hearts.

The call is not merely, "Try harder."

The call is, "Come closer."

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for revealing Your heart through Jesus.

Forgive me for the times I have treated obedience as outward performance while keeping parts of my heart away from You. Forgive me for defending what is right without always reflecting Your love.

Teach me to see Your law as the law of love.

Write Your will upon my heart. Let the life of Christ shape my thoughts, motives, words, and actions. Give me a righteousness that is not built on pride, fear, or appearance, but on faith, surrender, and love.

Help me to follow Jesus more fully.

Amen.

Journal Notes

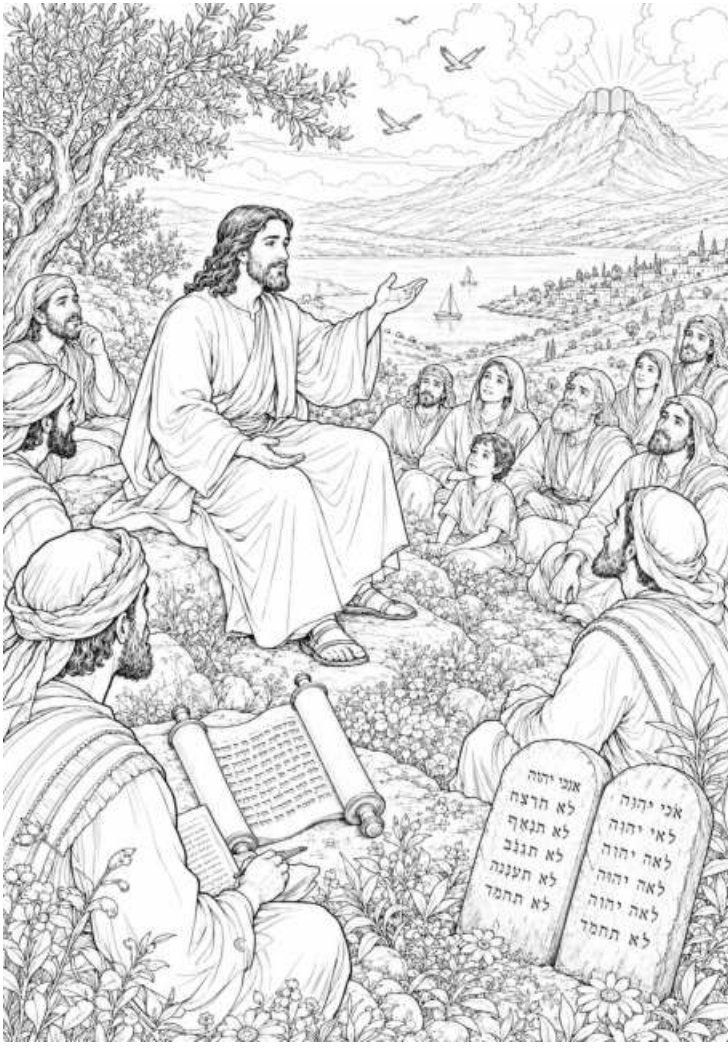
What does this passage reveal about the character of God?

Where am I tempted to settle for outward religion instead of inward surrender?

How does Jesus change the way I understand obedience?

What part of my heart needs to be brought back into harmony with God?

What is one practical way I can allow love to shape my obedience today?


אנכי יהוה
לא יהיה
לא תשא
לא תגנב
לא תענה
לא תחמד

13

Murder Begins in the Heart

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Scripture
Matthew –5:2126
Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,
Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall
be in danger of the judgment:
But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his
brother without a cause shall be in danger of the
judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother,
Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but
whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of
hell fire.
Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and
there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against
thee;
Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy
way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then
come and offer thy gift.
Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art
in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary
deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee
to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.
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Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come
out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost
farthing.
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When Jesus Spoke

The crowd knew the commandment.

"Thou shalt not kill."

No faithful Israelite would have argued against it. Murder was clearly forbidden. It belonged among the sins everyone recognised as serious. It was the kind of commandment that allowed people to feel safe in their own morality.

They could look at the violent man and say, "I am not like him."

They could look at the criminal and say, "I have not done that."

They could look at those whose hands were stained with blood and feel that the commandment had nothing to say to them.

Then Jesus spoke.

He did not weaken the commandment. He deepened it.

He did not say that murder no longer mattered. He showed that murder begins long before blood is shed. It begins where hatred is allowed to live. It begins where anger is nursed. It begins where contempt turns another person into something smaller than a soul created by God.

Jesus moved the commandment from the hand to the heart.

He showed that God's law does not only judge the outward act. It also searches the inward spirit from which the act grows.

This was unsettling because it removed the easy distance

between "good people" and "bad people." It revealed that the seed of violence may exist in a heart that has never lifted a weapon. A person may never kill and yet still cherish the spirit from which killing comes.

Jesus was not merely teaching people how to avoid murder.

He was teaching them how to love.

Understanding the Setting

Jesus had just declared that He had not come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil. He then began to show what that fulfilment meant in ordinary life.

The religious leaders often focused heavily on visible obedience. They measured righteousness by external conformity. If the act had not been committed, the person could appear innocent. If the rule had not been visibly broken, the conscience could remain undisturbed.

But Jesus revealed the spirituality of the law.

The commandment against murder was never only about protecting physical life. It was also about preserving the sacred value of the person. To hate another person, to despise them, to reduce them to a label, to speak of them with contempt, is already to violate the love that the commandment was meant to protect.

In the world of Jesus' listeners, anger and hostility were not theoretical matters. Jewish society lived under Roman occupation. There were political tensions, social divisions, religious rivalries, family conflicts, and resentment toward outsiders. Many people could condemn violent criminals while excusing bitterness in their own hearts.

Jesus exposed that contradiction.

He reminded them that God's concern is not only whether a person has avoided the final act of violence. God also sees the hidden movements of the heart: resentment, contempt, revenge, insult, and refusal to reconcile.

This teaching is just as searching today.

Many people would never physically harm another person, yet they destroy others with words, silence, gossip, sarcasm, public humiliation, online cruelty, or cold withdrawal. We may not strike with the hand, but we can wound with the tongue. We may not shed blood, but we can damage dignity.

Jesus does not allow us to separate worship from relationships.

If there is unresolved wrong, He says, leave the gift at the altar. First be reconciled. Then come and offer your gift.

God cares deeply about worship.

But He will not accept worship as a substitute for love.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus begins with what the people had heard:

"Thou shalt not kill."

Then He adds:

"But I say unto you..."

This phrase does not oppose the law. It reveals its fuller meaning. Jesus speaks with the authority of the One who knows the heart of God because He came from the Father.

He identifies three movements of the heart and mouth.

First, there is anger.

Anger may appear private. It may seem harmless if it remains hidden. Yet Jesus teaches that anger, when cherished without righteousness, places the soul in danger. Not every form of anger is sinful. Scripture speaks of righteous indignation against

evil. But the anger Jesus condemns is self-centred, resentful, uncontrolled, and destructive. It is the anger that wants to punish, diminish, or remove another person.

Second, there is contempt.

Jesus mentions the word "Raca," an insulting term that treated another person as empty, worthless, or foolish. Contempt is more than disagreement. It is the decision to look down on someone as beneath dignity. It does not merely say, "You have done wrong." It says, "You are worthless."

Contempt is dangerous because it makes cruelty feel justified.

Once we stop seeing a person as someone God values, we find it easier to dismiss, mock, expose, or harm them.

Third, there is condemnation.

Jesus warns against saying, "Thou fool." This is not a warning against honest moral discernment. Scripture itself warns against foolishness. The issue is the spirit that assumes the place of final judgment over another person. It is the spirit that writes someone off before God has finished working with them.

Jesus then turns from warning to action.

If someone remembers that another person has something against them, they must seek reconciliation. The command is practical and urgent. Do not hide behind religious activity. Do not use worship to avoid responsibility. Do not bring a gift to God while refusing to make peace where peace is possible.

This does not mean reconciliation is always simple. It does not mean trust is restored instantly. It does not mean abuse must be ignored or that boundaries are unnecessary. Jesus is not asking people to pretend that harm did not happen.

He is calling His followers to take responsibility for the part that belongs to them.

Where we have wronged someone, we must confess.

Where we have spoken carelessly, we must repair.

Where pride has delayed peace, we must humble ourselves.

Where resentment has grown, we must bring it into the light of God.

The final image is legal and urgent: agree with your adversary quickly while you are still on the way. Jesus is teaching that unresolved conflict has consequences. What we refuse to address early may later become harder, heavier, and more costly.

Sin never remains still.

If anger is not surrendered, it deepens.

If contempt is not confessed, it hardens.

If broken relationships are never faced, they become prisons of the soul.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals that God values people more deeply than we often do.

He does not only forbid murder because life must be protected physically. He forbids the spirit of murder because every person bears sacred worth before Him.

God is not satisfied with polite cruelty.

He is not satisfied with religious performance while bitterness remains untouched. He is not impressed by worship that avoids love. He is not honoured by prayers spoken from a heart that refuses reconciliation.

This shows us something beautiful and serious about His character.

God is holy enough to judge the hidden heart.

God is merciful enough to heal it.

He does not expose anger in order to shame us, but to save us from what anger becomes when it is left alone. He knows that resentment deforms the person who carries it. He knows that contempt blinds the soul. He knows that hatred makes us unlike Him.

The Father Jesus reveals is not content merely to restrain the hand.

He wants to restore the heart.

He wants to create a people whose relationships reflect His own character. A people who do not simply avoid violence, but practise mercy. A people who do not merely keep from killing, but learn how to honour life. A people who do not hide behind religious language, but seek peace with humility and truth.

At the centre of this teaching stands Jesus Himself.

He would be hated without cause.

He would be insulted, falsely accused, rejected, mocked, and crucified.

Yet He did not answer hatred with hatred.

He did not treat His enemies as worthless.

Even from the cross, He prayed for those who wounded Him.

In Jesus, we see the law fulfilled not as cold regulation, but as living love. He shows us what it means for the heart to be free from revenge. He shows us what it means to entrust justice to God while still extending mercy to people.

The commandment says, "Do not murder."

Jesus says, "Let Me remove from you the spirit that destroys."

Looking Within

This passage asks us to examine the places where anger has become familiar.

Not every wound heals quickly. Some wrongs are deep. Some relationships are complicated. Some memories still hurt when they are touched. Jesus does not minimise pain. He does not ask us to call evil good.

But He does ask us to bring our inner life before Him honestly.

There is a difference between pain and hatred.

There is a difference between grief and contempt.

There is a difference between wise boundaries and a heart that secretly wants another person to suffer.

Sometimes anger hides beneath respectable language. We call it discernment, but it is resentment. We call it honesty, but it is cruelty. We call it distance, but it is punishment. We call it principle, but it is pride.

Jesus sees clearly.

He sees the words we nearly said.

He sees the messages we typed and deleted.

He sees the conversations where we rehearsed another person's faults.

He sees the quiet satisfaction we felt when someone who hurt us was embarrassed, exposed, or brought low.

And still He calls us.

Not to denial.

Not to shallow peace.

Not to forced closeness.

But to freedom.

The question is not only, "Have I harmed someone outwardly?"

The deeper question is, "What have I allowed to live in my heart?"

Is there someone I have reduced to a label?

Is there someone I speak about with contempt?

Is there someone I avoid reconciling with because my pride feels safer than obedience?

Is there someone who has something against me because of something I said, did, ignored, or failed to repair?

Jesus does not leave us with vague guilt. He gives a practical path.

Go.

Be reconciled.

Agree quickly.

Make peace where peace is possible.

Take responsibility for what is yours.

Do not wait for the heart to become soft by accident. Bring it to Christ. Ask Him to do what self-control alone cannot do.

Only grace can remove the roots of hatred.

Only love can make the heart whole.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to come down from the judgment seat.

He invites us to stop measuring righteousness only by what we have not done.

"I have never killed."

"I have never gone that far."

"I have never acted on it."

But Jesus asks for more than outward restraint. He asks for the hidden room where anger is stored. He asks for the words we use when the person is not present. He asks for the secret court

where we replay the case and always make ourselves innocent.

His invitation is not merely, "Control your anger."

His invitation is, "Bring your anger to Me."

Bring the wound.

Bring the resentment.

Bring the name of the person you struggle to bless.

Bring the memory that still tightens your chest.

Bring the apology you have delayed.

Bring the conversation you have avoided.

Bring the pride that would rather worship than reconcile.

Jesus does not call us to reconciliation because relationships are easy. He calls us to reconciliation because the Father's heart is peace.

The same God who came near to us while we were His enemies now teaches us how to move toward others with humility, courage, and grace.

Today, the invitation is simple but costly:

Do not let anger become your home.

Do not let contempt shape your voice.

Do not bring worship to God while refusing the work of love.

Go first.

Speak gently.

Confess honestly.

Forgive deeply.

Trust God with justice.

Let Christ make your heart safe for others.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

You see my heart more clearly than I see it myself.

You know where anger has lived too long. You know where hurt has hardened into resentment. You know where I have spoken carelessly, judged harshly, or treated another person as less valuable than someone made in Your image.

Forgive me.

Teach me to see people as You see them. Give me courage to make right what I have done wrong. Give me wisdom where reconciliation is complicated. Give me humility where pride has delayed obedience.

Lord Jesus, remove from me the spirit that wounds, condemns, and destroys. Place within me Your own spirit of mercy, truth, patience, and peace.

Help me not only to avoid evil, but to become a person through whom Your love can be seen.

Amen.

Journal Notes

Where have I allowed anger to remain unresolved in my heart?

Is there someone I have begun to see with contempt rather than compassion?

Have I used words, silence, sarcasm, or distance to wound

another person?

Is there someone who may have something against me because of my actions or attitude?

What step of reconciliation is Jesus inviting me to take?

Where do I need wisdom to pursue peace without pretending that harm did not happen?

How does this passage change the way I understand the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill"?

What does this teaching reveal about the value God places on every person?



14

The Fire of Lust

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Scripture
Matthew −5:2730
Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,
Thou shalt not commit adultery:
But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman
to lust after her hath committed adultery with her
already in his heart.
And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and
cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that
one of thy members should perish, and not that thy
whole body should be cast into hell.
And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and
cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that
one of thy members should perish, and not that thy
whole body should be cast into hell.
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When Jesus Spoke

The people knew the commandment.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

It was clear. It was serious. It protected marriage, family, covenant, trust, and human dignity.

Many who listened to Jesus may have felt safe beneath that commandment. They had not crossed the visible line. They had not broken the marriage vow in public. They had not been exposed before the community. Their outward life still looked respectable.

Then Jesus spoke to the hidden life.

He did not weaken the commandment. He revealed its depth.

Adultery does not begin only in the body. It begins when desire is welcomed into the heart and allowed to possess the imagination. It begins when another person is no longer seen as a soul made in the image of God, but as an object for private use.

Jesus moved the commandment from the act to the gaze.

He showed that sin is not only what the hand does. It is also what the heart cherishes.

This was not a small correction. It was a searching revelation.

A person may avoid outward scandal while inwardly feeding the same fire. A person may appear faithful in public while being divided in secret. A person may keep the letter of the commandment while violating the spirit of love that stands behind it.

Jesus was not merely defending marriage.

He was defending the human heart.

He was defending the dignity of the person who is looked upon.

He was defending the holiness of love.

Understanding the Setting

Jesus had already shown that murder begins in the heart. Now He shows that adultery also begins there.

The pattern is important.

The righteousness of the kingdom is not satisfied with outward compliance while the inner life remains untouched. Jesus is not interested in behaviour management alone. He is forming people whose hearts are being restored by grace.

In the world of His hearers, adultery was treated as a serious violation of God's law. Yet, as with anger, the focus could easily remain on the visible act. If the act was avoided, the person might feel innocent.

Jesus exposes the deeper problem.

He speaks of the look that lusts. This is not a passing awareness of beauty. It is not the involuntary recognition that another person is attractive. Jesus is speaking about the deliberate gaze that desires possession. It is the look that pauses, feeds itself, imagines, takes, and returns for more.

The issue is not sight alone.

The issue is the heart using sight as a doorway for sin.

In *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, Ellen G. White makes the same point: when an evil thought is loved and cherished, it reveals that sin still reigns in the heart. Temptation does not create the evil; it reveals what has been hidden and allowed to live within.

This makes the teaching deeply relevant today.

We live in an age where lust is not only private. It is commercialised, algorithmic, portable, and constant. Images are designed to capture attention. Entertainment often trains the eye to consume people. Social media rewards display,

comparison, fantasy, and hidden appetite. A person can carry more temptation in a pocket than previous generations may have encountered in a lifetime.

Yet the words of Jesus remain precise.

The problem is not merely the world outside us.

The problem is what the heart learns to love.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus begins with the seventh commandment:

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Then He says:

"But I say unto you..."

Again, Jesus is not replacing the law. He is revealing its full spiritual meaning.

Adultery is not only a breach of physical faithfulness. It is a violation of covenant love. It turns what should be faithful, self-giving, and sacred into something selfish and consuming.

Lust is love turned inward.

Love gives.

Lust takes.

Love sees the whole person.

Lust reduces the person to the body.

Love honours covenant.

Lust seeks pleasure without responsibility.

Love protects dignity.

Lust uses dignity as material for fantasy.

Jesus therefore speaks with severe urgency. If the right eye causes one to stumble, it must be cast away. If the right hand causes one to stumble, it must be cut off.

This is not a command to harm the body. Jesus is using

strong moral imagery to show that sin must not be managed casually. Whatever becomes an instrument of spiritual ruin must be surrendered.

The eye represents what we choose to look at.

The hand represents what we choose to do.

Together, they show that discipleship must include both attention and action.

Some things cannot be prayed over while we continue to feed them. Some habits cannot be kept near while we claim to desire purity. Some doors must be closed. Some patterns must be broken. Some forms of access must be removed.

Jesus is not calling for shallow shame.

He is calling for decisive surrender.

There is mercy in the severity of His words. He knows that sin never remains harmless. Lust promises pleasure but produces bondage. It trains the heart to divide people into desirable and disposable. It weakens covenant love. It corrupts imagination. It makes secrecy feel normal. It teaches the soul to live in fragments.

Jesus loves us too much to speak gently about a fire that can destroy the whole house.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals that God cares about purity because He cares about love.

He is not opposed to desire because He is cold. He created human beings with bodies, affection, longing, beauty, marriage, and covenant. The problem is not that people are embodied. The problem is that sin bends desire away from love and toward possession.

God's law protects what sin tries to cheapen.

It protects marriage from betrayal.

It protects women and men from being reduced to objects.

It protects the imagination from becoming a hidden room of unfaithfulness.

It protects the soul from the slow hardening that comes when desire is separated from holiness.

This teaching also reveals the kindness of God's holiness.

God does not wait until outward collapse before He speaks. He comes to the beginning of the fire. He points to the spark before the flame spreads. He names the hidden danger before it becomes visible destruction.

The heart of God is not merely to condemn impurity.

His heart is to restore purity.

And purity, in Scripture, is never merely the absence of sexual sin. It is wholeness before God. It is an undivided heart. It is the restoration of love to its proper order.

Jesus Himself reveals this purity.

He moved among people with perfect holiness and perfect compassion. He did not treat the vulnerable as objects. He did not exploit weakness. He did not flatter sin, but neither did He crush the sinner who came to Him in need. His purity was not harsh distance. It was holy love.

In Christ, we see a heart entirely surrendered to the Father.

That is the purity He invites us into.

Not fear-driven performance.

Not public respectability.

Not hidden shame.

A clean heart.

A restored gaze.

A love that honours God and sees people truthfully.

Looking Within

This passage asks us to become honest about what we allow into the imagination.

Many sins survive because they remain unnamed. They are hidden behind phrases like "it is not that serious," "I am only looking," "everyone struggles with this," or "at least I have not acted on it."

Jesus does not allow those hiding places to remain untouched.

He asks us to consider what our eyes return to.

What do I allow myself to look at?

What do I excuse because it happens privately?

What do I feed in secret while asking God to bless my public life?

What habits are training my desires?

What forms of entertainment, scrolling, fantasy, or conversation are making purity harder?

Where have I treated another person as an object rather than a soul?

This passage is not only for people who are married. It is for every disciple because it concerns the formation of the heart.

For the unmarried, it asks whether desire is being shaped by holiness, patience, and respect.

For the married, it asks whether covenant love is being protected in both body and imagination.

For all believers, it asks whether our inner life agrees with the God we worship.

Jesus does not call us to despair. He calls us to decisive grace.

There may be habits to confess.

There may be access to remove.

There may be accountability to seek.

There may be wounds, loneliness, boredom, or emotional hunger that have been wrongly medicated through lust.

There may be a need to learn again how to see people, not as images for consumption, but as persons deeply loved by God.

The question is not merely, "How close can I come to sin without falling?"

The better question is, "What kind of heart is Jesus forming in me?"

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to bring our desires into the light.

He does not ask for the polished version of the heart. He asks for the true one.

Bring the gaze that keeps returning.

Bring the fantasy that feels difficult to release.

Bring the habit that has become familiar.

Bring the shame that says change is no longer possible.

Bring the loneliness beneath the lust.

Bring the divided heart.

The same Jesus who exposes sin also heals the sinner. He does not reveal the fire to leave us burning. He reveals it so that we may be saved from it.

His invitation is not only, "Stop looking."

It is, "Come closer to Me."

A heart filled with Christ is not made pure by emptiness alone. It is made pure by a greater love.

When Christ becomes more beautiful to the soul, sin begins to lose some of its power. When the Father's love becomes more real, counterfeit comfort becomes less convincing. When the Holy Spirit restores the imagination, the eye can learn to see

again.

Today, Jesus may be inviting you to one clear act of surrender.

Close the door.

Delete the source.

End the conversation.

Confess the habit.

Ask for help.

Guard the eye.

Consecrate the hand.

Choose the higher love.

Not because God wants to take life from you, but because He wants to restore life in you.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

You see my heart completely. Nothing is hidden from You.

You know where my desires have become disordered. You know what I have allowed my eyes to rest upon. You know the thoughts I have excused, the habits I have hidden, and the places where my heart has been divided.

Forgive me.

Lord Jesus, cleanse my heart and restore my sight. Teach me to see people as souls made in Your image, not as objects for selfish desire. Give me courage to remove whatever leads me away from You.

Where there is shame, give me mercy.

Where there is bondage, give me freedom.

Where there is weakness, give me strength.

Where there is a divided heart, make me whole.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit

within me.

Amen.

Journal Notes

What does this passage reveal about the way Jesus understands purity?

Where am I most tempted to separate outward respectability from inward faithfulness?

What do my eyes regularly return to, and what is that forming in me?

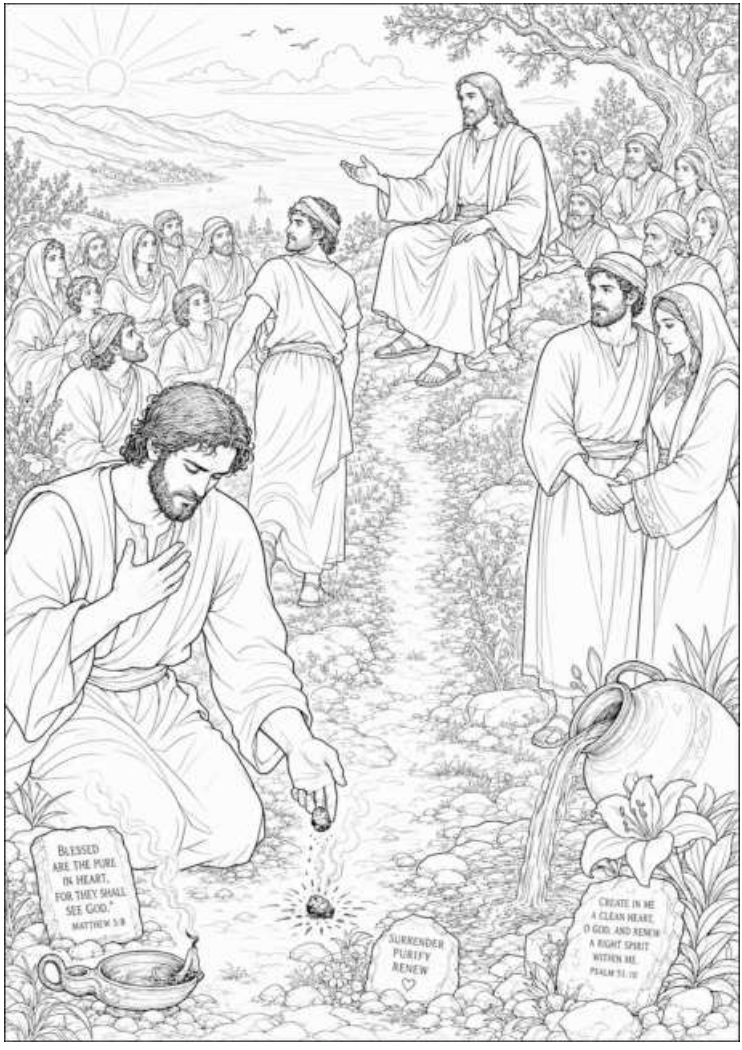
Are there habits, apps, conversations, images, or forms of entertainment that I need to remove or limit?

Where have I treated another person as an object rather than as someone made in God's image?

What desire, wound, loneliness, or emotional need may be sitting beneath the temptation?

What practical step is Jesus inviting me to take today?

How does this passage reveal God's desire to restore, not merely restrain, the heart?


BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART, FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD."
MATTHEW 5:8
SURRENDER
PURIFY
RENEW
CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD, AND RENEW A RIGHT SPIRIT WITHIN ME.
PSALM 51:10

15

Faithfulness and Covenant

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Scripture
Matthew –5:3132
It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife,
let him give her a writing of divorcement:
But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his
wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth
her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her
that is divorced committeth adultery.
```

When Jesus Spoke

The words were brief, but they carried great weight.

"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement."

Many had reduced marriage to a legal procedure. If the paperwork was correct, the conscience could feel clean. If a certificate had been given, the man could claim that he had

acted within the law.

Then Jesus spoke.

He did not begin with loopholes.

He began with covenant.

He showed that marriage is not merely a contract that may be ended when affection fades, inconvenience grows, or desire turns elsewhere. Marriage is a sacred joining before God. It concerns faithfulness, protection, honour, and the keeping of love when love becomes costly.

Jesus was not speaking coldly about failed relationships. He was defending the vulnerable. In His world, easy divorce often left women exposed to shame, poverty, and social rejection. A man could use the language of law while leaving another person wounded by his hardness of heart.

Jesus would not allow that.

He placed covenant back under the light of God's character.

He showed that God does not measure faithfulness only by legal correctness. He measures it by love, truth, mercy, and responsibility.

Understanding the Setting

This teaching follows Jesus' words on lust. That order matters.

First, Jesus addressed the divided heart that looks with selfish desire. Then He addressed the broken covenant that may follow when desire is allowed to rule. Lust treats people as objects. Divorce, when driven by hardness of heart, may treat covenant as disposable.

The issue in Matthew 5:31–32 is not simply legal divorce. It is the misuse of religious permission to cover relational unfaithfulness.

In Deuteronomy 24, Moses regulated divorce in a fallen society. The certificate of divorce offered some legal protection to a woman who had been sent away. But by the time of Jesus, many treated that regulation as permission to dismiss a wife for light or selfish reasons.

Jesus later explained the deeper problem clearly. When the Pharisees asked whether a man could put away his wife "for every cause," Jesus took them back to creation: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." When they appealed to Moses, Jesus answered that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of human hearts, "but from the beginning it was not so."

That is the heart of this passage.

Jesus moves the question from, "What am I allowed to do?" to "What did God intend from the beginning?"

That shift matters for every generation.

People often ask, "How far can I go and still be technically right?" Jesus asks, "What does love require?" People ask, "What is permitted?" Jesus asks, "What is faithful?" People ask, "Can I justify this?" Jesus asks, "Is your heart becoming like the Father?"

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus' words are serious because covenant is serious.

He says that whoever puts away his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery. His words must be read with care, reverence, and pastoral sensitivity.

Jesus is not denying that some marriages are deeply damaged by sin. He names sexual unfaithfulness as a real covenant

violation. Elsewhere, Scripture also recognises abandonment and the complexity of life in a fallen world. This passage should never be used to trap the abused, silence the betrayed, or force a person to remain in danger.

But neither should the passage be softened until it says nothing.

Jesus is confronting a culture of disposable covenant.

He is warning against the kind of divorce that is driven by selfishness, lust, convenience, hardness, or contempt. He is saying that a legal document does not automatically make a faithless act righteous. The paperwork may be in order while the heart is not.

This is a pattern in the Sermon on the Mount.

Murder is not only the act of killing. It begins in anger and contempt.

Adultery is not only the outward act. It begins in the lustful gaze.

Divorce is not only a legal procedure. It may reveal a heart that has forgotten covenant.

Jesus is teaching the spirituality of the law. In *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, the law is described as the expression of God's love, and Christ's mission is shown as bringing human hearts back into harmony with the principles of heaven.

Marriage, then, is not protected by law alone. It is protected by hearts made faithful through grace.

This does not mean every broken marriage can be repaired in the same way. Sin causes real damage. Trust can be shattered. Safety may need to be protected. Repentance cannot be manufactured. Reconciliation cannot be pretended.

But Jesus still calls His followers to honour covenant.

To honour covenant means refusing to treat people as dispos-

able.

It means telling the truth.

It means guarding the heart before betrayal begins.

It means seeking help before resentment becomes contempt.

It means refusing to use spiritual language to excuse selfishness.

It means remembering that faithfulness is not only a feeling. It is a way of reflecting God.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals that God is faithful.

He does not love lightly. He does not make promises carelessly. He does not enter covenant with His people and then abandon them when love becomes costly.

Throughout Scripture, God uses marriage language to describe His relationship with His people. He is the faithful Husband who calls His wandering people back. His love is tender, holy, jealous for good, and slow to give up.

That is why Jesus speaks so strongly here.

He is not defending an institution for its own sake. He is revealing the heart of God behind the institution. Marriage was meant to tell the truth about covenant love. It was meant to show faithfulness, belonging, protection, tenderness, and steadfast commitment.

Sin distorts that picture.

Hardness of heart turns covenant into control.

Lust turns covenant into appetite.

Pride turns covenant into a battlefield.

Fear turns covenant into self-protection.

But Jesus calls us back to the Father's intention.

This does not mean God's heart is hard toward those who have experienced divorce. Many people carry grief, betrayal, regret, confusion, or shame around this subject. Some were abandoned. Some were abused. Some made decisions they now wish they had made differently. Some tried with all their strength and still watched the relationship break.

Jesus does not crush the wounded.

He speaks truth because He loves the wounded.

The same Christ who upholds the holiness of marriage also offers mercy to sinners, healing to the broken, wisdom to the confused, and restoration to those who come to Him honestly.

God's faithfulness is not revealed only in ideal homes.

It is also revealed when He meets people in the ruins and teaches them how to walk again.

Looking Within

This passage asks us to examine our understanding of commitment.

Many people want covenant blessings without covenant surrender. We want closeness without vulnerability, loyalty without sacrifice, forgiveness without humility, and love without the death of self.

Jesus does not allow us to treat relationships lightly.

This passage asks married readers to consider whether they are protecting the covenant in small daily ways.

Am I guarding my heart?

Am I feeding resentment?

Am I allowing comparison, fantasy, or emotional distance to grow?

Am I speaking to my spouse with honour?

Am I using silence as punishment?

Am I avoiding difficult conversations because peace feels easier than truth?

Am I asking what faithfulness requires, or only what I can get away with?

This passage also asks unmarried readers to consider how they view marriage.

Do I see marriage as covenant or convenience?

Am I preparing for faithfulness now in the way I handle desire, conflict, honesty, and responsibility?

Am I learning to honour people before I enter a covenant with one person?

And for those who have experienced divorce, this passage invites honest reflection without despair.

What pain do I need to bring to Jesus?

What responsibility is mine to confess?

What grief still needs healing?

What wisdom do I need for future relationships?

What would faithfulness look like now, in the life I am actually living?

Jesus does not ask us to rewrite the past.

He asks us to bring the past into His light.

There, truth and mercy meet.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to recover the sacredness of covenant.

He invites the married to protect love before it breaks.

He invites the tempted to turn back before desire becomes betrayal.

He invites the wounded to come near without hiding.

He invites the guilty to confess without despair.

He invites the abandoned to know that they are not abandoned by God.

He invites the church to speak about marriage with both conviction and compassion.

The invitation is not merely, "Do not divorce."

It is deeper than that.

"Let Me teach you faithfulness."

Let Me teach you to love with patience.

Let Me teach you to speak truth without cruelty.

Let Me teach you to repent quickly.

Let Me teach you to forgive wisely.

Let Me teach you to protect what is sacred.

Let Me teach you to see people as covenant persons, not disposable objects.

The heart that belongs to Jesus cannot treat promises casually.

His grace does not make covenant less serious. It makes faithfulness possible.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

You are faithful in all Your ways.

You keep covenant even when we are weak, fearful, selfish, or slow to love. Thank You for revealing Your heart through Jesus.

Teach me to honour what You call sacred. Guard my heart from hardness, lust, pride, resentment, and selfishness. Where I have treated people lightly, forgive me. Where I have broken trust, lead me into honest repentance. Where I have been wounded, meet me with Your mercy and wisdom.

Lord Jesus, make my heart faithful.

Help me to love truthfully, act responsibly, and reflect Your covenant love in my relationships.

Amen.

Journal Notes

What does this passage reveal about the seriousness of covenant before God?

Where am I tempted to ask, "What is permitted?" instead of, "What is faithful?"

How does Jesus' teaching protect the vulnerable?

What small habits either strengthen or weaken faithfulness in relationships?

Where do I need to repent of hardness of heart, avoidance, resentment, or selfishness?

If I have been wounded by broken covenant, what part of that pain do I need to bring to Jesus?

How does God's faithfulness change the way I understand

marriage, commitment, and love?

What practical step is Jesus inviting me to take today?



16

Truth Without Oaths

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Scripture
Matthew –5:3337
Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them
of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but
shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:
But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by
heaven; for it is God's throne:
Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by
Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.
Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou
canst not make one hair white or black.
But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay:
for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.
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When Jesus Spoke

The people knew the seriousness of an oath.

To swear by God’s name was not a small matter. An oath called

heaven to witness. It placed one's words beneath the authority of God. To break such an oath was not merely dishonest. It was irreverent.

Yet over time, people had found ways to protect the appearance of truth while leaving room for deception.

They might avoid swearing directly by the name of God, but swear by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or even their own head. Some oaths sounded serious. Others were treated as less binding. The result was a strange moral game: a person could sound truthful while still looking for a way to escape full honesty.

Then Jesus spoke.

"Swear not at all."

He was not teaching His followers to treat words lightly. He was teaching them to treat every word as sacred.

In the kingdom of God, truth should not need decoration.

A disciple's simple "yes" should mean yes.

A disciple's simple "no" should mean no.

Jesus moved honesty from public performance to inward character. He was not merely correcting the misuse of oaths. He was calling His followers to become the kind of people whose ordinary speech can be trusted.

Understanding the Setting

This teaching belongs to the wider section where Jesus reveals the spiritual depth of the law.

He has already shown that murder begins in anger, adultery begins in lust, and covenant faithfulness cannot be reduced to legal procedure. Now He turns to speech.

The issue is not only whether a person has technically lied. The issue is whether the heart has become divided from the

mouth.

In ancient Jewish life, oaths were often used to strengthen promises, settle disputes, or give weight to testimony. The Old Testament warned against false swearing and commanded reverence for God's name. But by the time of Jesus, religious teachers had developed detailed distinctions between different kinds of oaths. Some were considered binding. Others were treated as less serious.

Jesus cuts through the system.

He points out that heaven, earth, Jerusalem, and even the human head are not independent objects. Heaven is God's throne. Earth is His footstool. Jerusalem is the city of the great King. Even the hairs of our head are beyond our control. No person can use God's world as a shield for dishonest speech.

Everything belongs to God.

Therefore, all speech is spoken before God.

This makes the teaching deeply relevant today. We may not often swear by heaven or Jerusalem, but we still know how to manage impressions. We can exaggerate, soften, omit, manipulate, flatter, imply, deny, or hide behind technical accuracy. We can tell the truth in such a way that it still misleads.

Jesus calls His followers out of that kind of speech.

He calls them into plain truth.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus begins with what had been taught:

"Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths."

In simple terms, do not swear falsely. If you make a vow before God, keep it.

But Jesus goes deeper.

He does not merely say, "Keep your oaths." He says, "Do not build a life that requires oaths to make your words believable."

This is not a rejection of truth. It is a higher standard of truth.

Oaths become necessary where trust has weakened. A person says, "I swear," because ordinary speech is no longer enough. Jesus calls His disciples to a life where speech is so consistent, honest, and clear that extra guarantees are unnecessary.

"Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay."

This is the speech of an undivided heart.

It is not evasive.

It is not theatrical.

It is not manipulative.

It does not use religious language to cover selfish motives.

It does not promise what it does not intend to keep.

It does not say "maybe" when it means "no."

It does not say "yes" to gain approval and then fail quietly.

It does not hide dishonesty behind careful wording.

This teaching reaches far beyond formal oaths. It touches promises, business dealings, marriage vows, church commitments, family conversations, public statements, social media posts, apologies, reports, and private messages.

A Christian's words should carry the weight of truth because the character behind them has been shaped by Christ.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is not creating a surface-level moral code. The project's core writing rule reminds us that Scripture remains the primary source, while each chapter should help readers rediscover the heart of God through Jesus' words. Here, that heart is clear: God desires truth that reaches the whole person.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals that God is truthful.

He does not deceive.

He does not manipulate.

He does not exaggerate to control us.

He does not make promises He will not keep.

His word can be trusted because His character is faithful.

When God speaks, reality rests upon His word. Creation itself comes forth by His command. Covenant promises stand because He is not divided. Mercy is real because He has spoken it. Judgment is real because He has spoken it. Salvation is real because He has spoken it in Christ.

Jesus reveals that same truthfulness.

There is no falsehood in Him. No hidden manipulation. No double speech. No promise given lightly. When He says, "Come unto Me," He means it. When He says, "I will give you rest," He is not offering empty comfort. When He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," He is not using truth as an idea. He is revealing truth as a Person.

This is why dishonest speech damages more than human trust. It misrepresents God.

When believers use words carelessly, people learn to distrust the faith we claim to represent. When we exaggerate, manipulate, or make promises we do not keep, we obscure the Father whose word is always faithful.

But when truth lives in the heart, speech becomes a witness.

A truthful life reveals something of God's character.

A simple yes, kept faithfully, can become an act of worship.

A simple no, spoken with humility, can protect integrity.

An honest confession can open the door to healing.

A promise kept in private can reflect the covenant faithfulness of God.

Jesus is not merely asking us to stop lying.

He is inviting us to become truthful people.

Looking Within

This passage asks us to examine the relationship between our words and our hearts.

Most people do not think of themselves as dishonest. We often reserve that word for serious fraud, open lies, or deliberate betrayal. But Jesus presses deeper.

Do I use words to create an impression rather than tell the truth?

Do I exaggerate to appear more competent, spiritual, wounded, generous, or important than I am?

Do I make commitments too quickly because I want approval?

Do I say "yes" when wisdom requires "no"?

Do I avoid directness because I fear disappointment, conflict, or rejection?

Do I tell part of the truth while concealing the part that would change the listener's understanding?

Do I use religious language to make my choices sound more faithful than they are?

The command of Jesus is wonderfully simple, but it is not easy.

"Yes" must mean yes.

"No" must mean no.

That kind of speech requires courage. It requires humility. It requires a heart that fears God more than human opinion. It requires freedom from the need to manage how everyone sees us.

Many falsehoods begin with fear.

Fear of being disliked.

Fear of losing control.

Fear of being exposed.

Fear of disappointing others.

Fear of consequences.

Jesus meets us in that fear. He does not merely demand honesty from a distance. He invites us into the Father's care, where we no longer need deception to protect ourselves.

Truth becomes possible when we trust God with the cost of telling it.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us into plainness of heart.

He invites us to lay down the complicated speech of self-protection.

No more hiding behind technical truth.

No more promising to keep peace while inwardly refusing.

No more spiritual-sounding words that cover selfish motives.

No more exaggeration to feel significant.

No more silence used to mislead.

No more "yes" spoken only because we are afraid to say "no."

His invitation is not harsh. It is freeing.

A truthful life is lighter than a managed life.

A simple word is lighter than a constructed image.

An honest confession is lighter than a hidden lie.

A faithful promise is lighter than an impressive oath.

Jesus calls us to speech that belongs to the kingdom of heaven: clear, honest, humble, reliable, and filled with love.

Today, the invitation may be very practical.

Tell the truth.

Keep the promise.

Correct the exaggeration.

Admit what you know.

Admit what you do not know.

Say yes only where you can be faithful.

Say no where obedience requires it.

Let your words become simple because your heart is becoming whole.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

You are faithful and true.

Your word is trustworthy. Your promises are sure. There is no deceit in You.

Forgive me for the times I have used words carelessly. Forgive me where I have exaggerated, hidden, promised lightly, avoided truth, or used speech to protect my image rather than honour You.

Lord Jesus, make my heart truthful.

Teach me to speak with simplicity, courage, and love. Help my yes to be yes, and my no to be no. Free me from fear, people-pleasing, manipulation, and the need to manage appearances.

Let my words reflect Your character.

Amen.

Journal Notes

Where am I most tempted to manage impressions rather than speak plainly?

Do my ordinary words carry trust, or do I often need to explain, defend, or strengthen them?

Where have I said "yes" when I should have said "no"?

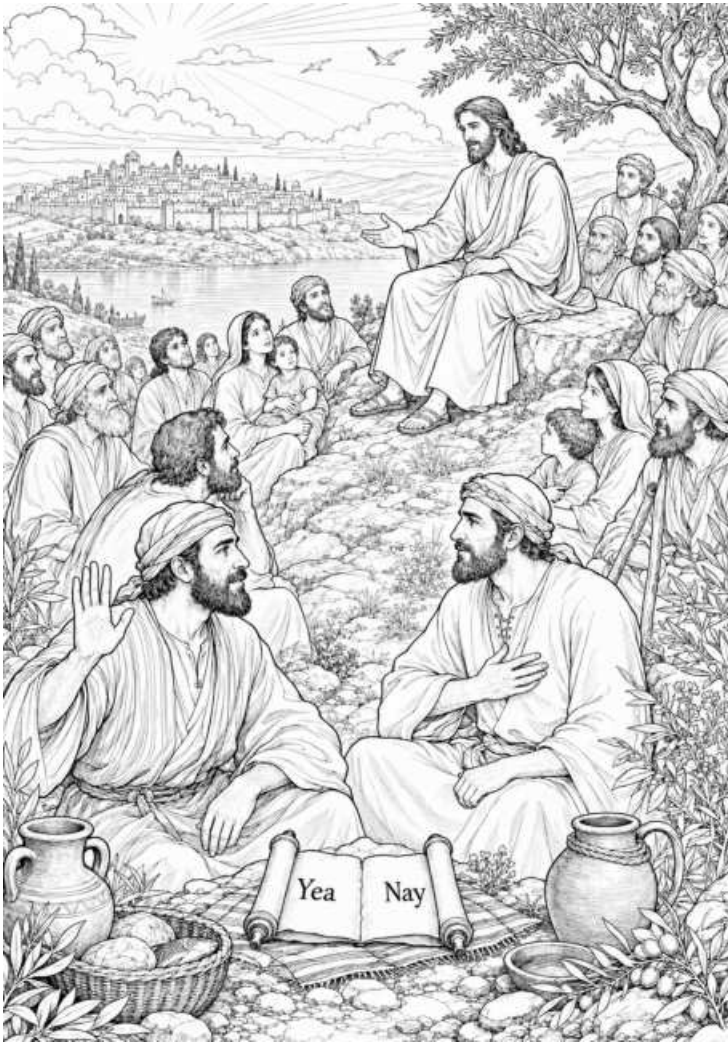
Where have I avoided truth because I feared conflict or disappointment?

Have I used religious or spiritual language to make something sound more faithful than it really was?

Is there a promise I need to keep, correct, or honestly release?

What would it look like for my speech to reflect the truthfulness of God?

What simple act of honesty is Jesus inviting me to practise today?


Yea
Nay

17

Turning the Other Cheek

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Scripture
Matthew –5:3842
Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an
eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but
whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn
to him the other also.
And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take
away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.
And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with
him twain.
Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would
borrow of thee turn not thou away.
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When Jesus Spoke

The crowd knew the words.

"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

To many, those words sounded like permission to repay injury with injury. If someone wounded you, you could wound them back. If someone humiliated you, you could answer with humiliation. If someone took from you, you could demand the same measure in return.

But the original command was never meant to give ordinary people a private licence for revenge. It belonged to the realm of justice. It limited retaliation. It restrained vengeance. It ensured that punishment would not exceed the offence.

Then Jesus spoke.

"Resist not evil."

"Turn to him the other also."

His words must have fallen heavily on the crowd.

They were not living in comfort. They were not free from oppression. Many of them knew insult, Roman power, economic pressure, social humiliation, and legal vulnerability. They longed for deliverance. Some longed for revenge.

Jesus did not deny their suffering.

He showed them another kingdom.

He was not calling them to cowardice. He was calling them out of retaliation. He was not asking them to pretend evil was good. He was teaching them not to become evil in their response to evil.

The kingdom heart does not answer every wound with a wound.

The disciple of Jesus does not allow another person's cruelty to choose the shape of his soul.

Understanding the Setting

This teaching was not spoken in a neutral world.

The Jewish people lived under Roman occupation. Roman soldiers were present in Judea and Galilee, and their presence constantly reminded the people of their national humiliation. *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* describes how contact with Roman soldiery created repeated occasions of irritation, and how compulsory service, such as forcing peasants to carry burdens, deepened resentment among the people.

This helps us understand the force of Jesus' words.

When He spoke of being struck on the cheek, sued for one's coat, or compelled to go a mile, He was not speaking in abstractions. He was speaking into the daily injuries of a people who knew what it meant to feel powerless.

The slap on the cheek was not only physical pain. It was insult.

The lawsuit over a coat was not only legal conflict. It touched survival and dignity.

The forced mile was not only inconvenience. It was domination by an occupying power.

The people expected the Messiah to humble Rome. Instead, Jesus addressed the spirit of revenge in His own people.

This does not mean Jesus approved injustice. It means He refused to build His kingdom through the same spirit that rules oppressive kingdoms. He would overcome evil, but not by hatred, revenge, or violence of the heart.

That distinction matters today.

Turning the other cheek is often misunderstood. It does not mean enabling abuse. It does not mean remaining in danger. It does not mean injustice should never be reported, resisted through lawful means, or confronted with truth. Jesus Himself

named evil, exposed hypocrisy, and protected the vulnerable.

The issue here is retaliation.

Jesus is teaching His followers not to let injury produce a revenge-shaped heart.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus gives four examples.

First, He speaks of the cheek.

"If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also."

This is not a command to enjoy humiliation or invite harm. It is a call to refuse revenge. The disciple does not need to answer insult with insult. He does not need to protect pride by returning the same spirit. He can remain steady because his dignity comes from God, not from the approval or cruelty of another person.

Second, He speaks of the coat and cloak.

"If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also."

Jesus is describing a willingness to surrender personal rights rather than become ruled by bitterness, grasping, or endless contention. He is not saying justice has no place. He is saying that the heart of the disciple must not be possessed by the need to win every dispute.

Third, He speaks of the second mile.

"And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."

Under Roman authority, a person could be compelled to carry a burden. The first mile was forced. The second mile was freely given.

Here Jesus turns humiliation into witness.

The oppressor may command the first mile, but he cannot command the heart. The second mile reveals a freedom that coercion cannot control. It shows that the disciple belongs to a kingdom deeper than earthly power.

Fourth, He speaks of generosity.

"Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."

Jesus is not commanding careless giving without wisdom. He is confronting the closed heart. His followers must not become so protective of themselves that compassion disappears.

In all four examples, Jesus is dealing with the same inner posture.

Do not be ruled by revenge.

Do not be ruled by pride.

Do not be ruled by possessiveness.

Do not be ruled by fear.

The person who belongs to the Father can live from a deeper freedom. He can absorb insult without becoming insulting. He can lose something without losing his soul. He can serve beyond what is demanded without becoming a slave inwardly. He can give because his life is held by God.

This is not natural.

It is the life of Christ formed within us.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals the patience of God.

God does not treat us as our sins deserve. He does not answer every offence with immediate retaliation. He bears long with the proud, the careless, the rebellious, and the ungrateful. His restraint is not weakness. It is mercy.

In Jesus, this mercy becomes visible.

His whole earthly life revealed the principle He taught. *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* points to Christ's life as the manifestation of this spirit: although slander and persecution followed Him, they drew from Him only forgiving love; from the cross came His prayer for His murderers and His word of hope to the dying thief.

This is the heart of God.

He does not overcome evil by becoming evil.

He does not defeat hatred by hating.

He does not answer human violence with a heart of revenge.

At the cross, Jesus turned the other cheek in the deepest sense. He did not call twelve legions of angels to defend His honour. He did not return insult for insult. He entrusted Himself to the Father and gave His life for the very world that rejected Him.

That does not make evil less evil.

It makes grace more astonishing.

The God revealed in Jesus is not indifferent to injustice. He will judge all things rightly. But He also makes space for repentance. He absorbs hostility in order to save enemies. He meets human cruelty with holy love.

When Jesus calls us to turn the other cheek, He is not asking us to do something He refused to do Himself.

He is inviting us to share His own spirit.

Looking Within

This passage asks us to examine how we respond when we are wronged.

Most of us know the desire to answer quickly.

A harsh word rises when we are insulted.

A defensive explanation forms when we are misunderstood.

A private speech begins in the mind where we win the argument, expose the other person, and prove our innocence.

Sometimes we do not retaliate outwardly, but we do it inwardly. We replay the offence. We sharpen our resentment. We imagine the other person being humbled. We wait for their failure and call it justice.

Jesus sees that hidden revenge.

He asks us to bring it into His light.

Where do I feel the need to strike back?

Where has my dignity become dependent on winning?

Where do I confuse meekness with weakness?

Where do I confuse revenge with justice?

Where am I holding so tightly to my rights that love has disappeared?

This teaching is difficult because it touches the ego. It asks us to surrender the pleasure of retaliation. It asks us to trust God with our reputation, our possessions, our time, and our sense of fairness.

But it does not ask us to become passive toward evil.

There are times to speak truth.

There are times to set boundaries.

There are times to leave danger.

There are times to involve lawful authority.

There are times to protect the vulnerable.

Turning the other cheek does not mean refusing wisdom. It means refusing revenge.

The question is not, "Must I let people harm me?"

The question is, "Can I respond to harm without becoming governed by hatred?"

Jesus wants to make that possible.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us into a freedom that revenge can never give.

Revenge promises relief, but it keeps the wound open.

Retaliation promises strength, but it often makes us servants of the person who hurt us.

Pride promises dignity, but it leaves the heart fragile and easily provoked.

Jesus offers something better.

He invites us to stand in the Father's care.

He invites us to receive our dignity from God.

He invites us to surrender the need to win every exchange.

He invites us to practise mercy without denying truth.

He invites us to overcome evil without allowing evil to overcome us.

Today, His invitation may be very practical.

Do not send the angry message.

Do not return the insult.

Do not rehearse the humiliation again.

Do not punish with silence.

Do not use generosity as manipulation.

Do not confuse boundaries with bitterness.

Take the wound to Christ before you answer from it.

Ask Him for the strength to respond from love rather than pride.

This is not easy discipleship. But it is the way of Jesus.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

You are patient, merciful, and faithful.

You have not treated me as my sins deserve. You have shown me kindness where I deserved judgment, and mercy where I had no claim.

Forgive me for the times I have answered wrong with wrong. Forgive me where I have cherished revenge, defended my pride, or allowed another person's cruelty to shape my spirit.

Lord Jesus, teach me Your meekness.

Give me wisdom to resist evil without becoming evil. Give me courage to speak truth without hatred. Give me strength to set boundaries without bitterness. Help me to entrust my dignity, my reputation, and my wounds to the Father.

Make my heart free from revenge and full of Your love.

Amen.

Journal Notes

Where do I most quickly feel the desire to retaliate?

How do I usually respond when I am insulted, misunderstood, or treated unfairly?

Where have I confused revenge with justice?

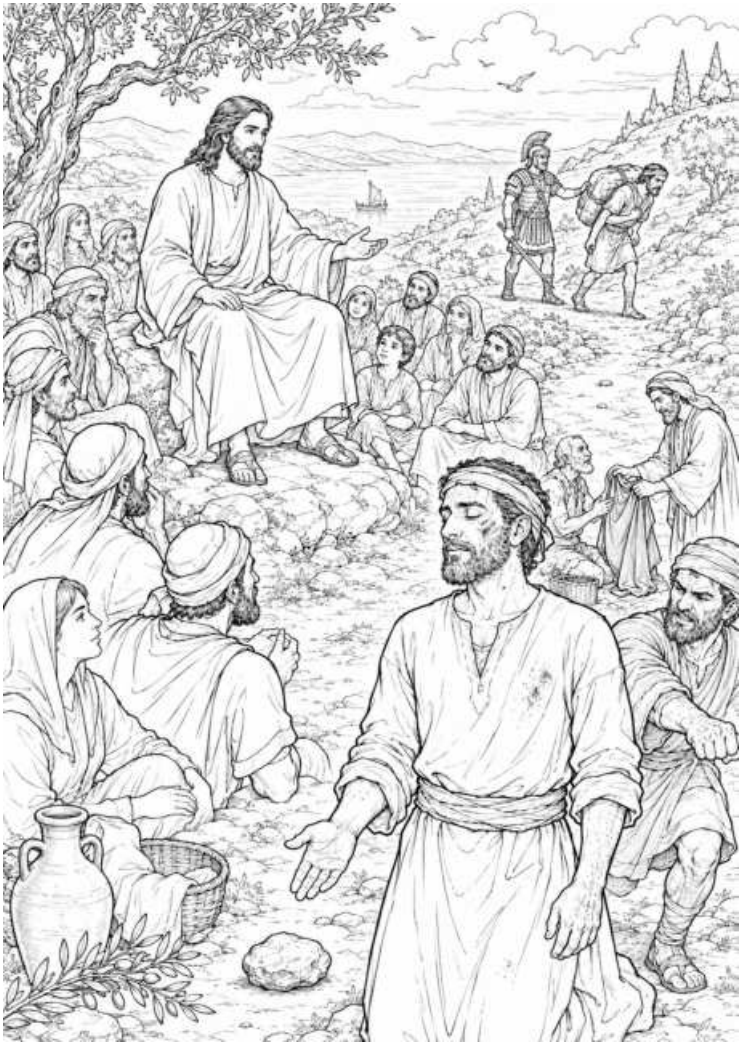
Is there someone whose actions still control my inner life because I keep rehearsing the offence?

What would it look like to respond with wisdom, not weakness, and mercy, not revenge?

Where do I need to set a boundary without hatred?

How does Jesus' example at the cross reshape my understanding of strength?

What practical step is Jesus inviting me to take today?



18

Love your Enemies

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Scripture
Matthew –5:4348
Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love
thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.
But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them
that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and
pray for them which despitefully use you, and
persecute you;
That ye may be the children of your Father which is
in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil
and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on
the unjust.
For if ye love them which love you, what reward have
ye? do not even the publicans the same?
And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more
than others? do not even the publicans so?
Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is
in heaven is perfect.
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When Jesus Spoke

The command to love one's neighbour was familiar.

The permission to hate one's enemy was not the true spirit of God's law, but it had become easy to believe. It felt natural. It seemed reasonable. Love those who belong to us. Distrust those who threaten us. Bless those who treat us well. Withhold kindness from those who wound us.

Then Jesus spoke.

"Love your enemies."

No sentence in the Sermon on the Mount sounds more impossible to the natural heart.

It is one thing to refuse revenge. It is another thing to love the one who has caused pain. It is one thing to hold back an angry word. It is another thing to pray for the person who has spoken against us. It is one thing to avoid hatred. It is another thing to do good to those who have shown us evil.

Jesus was not offering sentimental religion.

He was revealing the heart of the Father.

The Father sends sunshine on the evil and the good. He sends rain on the just and the unjust. His kindness is not restricted to those who deserve it. His mercy reaches toward people who do not yet love Him, thank Him, or honour Him.

This is the love Jesus calls His followers to reflect.

Not because enemies are always safe.

Not because evil should be excused.

Not because pain is imaginary.

But because the children of God must not take their moral shape from their enemies. They must take their shape from their Father.

Understanding the Setting

Jesus spoke these words to people living in a world of sharp divisions.

There were religious divisions between Pharisees, Sadducees, zealots, publicans, sinners, Samaritans, Gentiles, and ordinary Jews. There were political tensions under Roman occupation. There were social boundaries that taught people who counted as "neighbour" and who could be treated as an outsider.

Many people were willing to love within the circle.

Jesus widened the circle until it included the enemy.

This was not a minor adjustment. It struck at the heart of human pride. People often build identity by deciding who is outside the circle of mercy. We feel righteous when we love those who agree with us, support us, vote like us, worship like us, speak like us, and treat us well.

Jesus says that even publicans do that.

Kingdom love must go further.

In *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, Ellen G. White explains that Jesus pointed to forgiving love as the evidence of a higher motive than the publicans and sinners whom the religious leaders despised. She also notes that Jesus wanted His hearers to understand the tenderness of God's Fatherly heart toward them.

That is the setting of this teaching.

Jesus is not merely asking people to become kinder.

He is revealing what God is like.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus gives four commands.

Love your enemies.

Bless them that curse you.

Do good to them that hate you.

Pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.

Each command moves love from feeling into action.

To love an enemy does not mean to feel warm affection toward them. It means to seek their good before God. It means refusing to dehumanise them. It means refusing to wish destruction upon them. It means leaving judgment in God's hands while keeping one's own heart free from hatred.

To bless those who curse us means that our words must not become mirrors of their words. The disciple does not answer poison with poison. He does not need to return every insult, expose every weakness, or win every exchange.

To do good to those who hate us means that love must become visible. This does not mean enabling evil or removing proper consequences. It does mean that the disciple remains open to mercy, service, and kindness where wisdom allows.

To pray for persecutors is perhaps the deepest command. Prayer brings the enemy before God. It places the wound, the anger, and the injustice under the Father's authority. Prayer does not pretend the wrong was right. It asks God to act in truth, mercy, conviction, and redemption.

Jesus then gives the reason:

"That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."

The issue is family resemblance.

The children of God are called to reflect the Father's character.

God's love is not narrow, tribal, or reactive. He gives daily gifts even to those who ignore Him. Every sunrise is mercy. Every harvest is mercy. Every breath taken by the wicked is evidence that God is patient.

This kind of love is not weakness.

It is holiness.

Jesus ends with a searching call:

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

In this context, perfection is not cold flawlessness or spiritual performance. It is completeness of love. It is a heart no longer divided into "those I will love" and "those I am free to hate." It is love made whole by the Father's mercy.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals that God loves His enemies.

That is difficult to say honestly because we were once included among them. Scripture does not present humanity as naturally friendly toward God. Sin makes us resistant, suspicious, proud, and self-protective. Yet God did not wait for us to become worthy before He showed mercy.

Jesus is the clearest revelation of this love.

He loved those who misunderstood Him.

He loved those who rejected Him.

He loved those who mocked Him.

He loved those who nailed Him to the cross.

Even there, He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

That is not ordinary human love.

That is the heart of God revealed in flesh.

God's love does not deny justice. He remains holy. Evil remains evil. Judgment remains real. But His heart is not eager for destruction. He is patient, merciful, and generous. He gives space for repentance. He sends rain even on those who do not praise Him for it.

This changes how we understand discipleship.

To follow Jesus is not merely to believe correct doctrine, attend worship, avoid scandal, or practise private devotion. It is to receive the Father's love so deeply that it begins to move through us toward people we would naturally avoid, resent, or condemn.

Enemy-love is not produced by human willpower alone.

It grows where the love of God has entered the heart.

Looking Within

This passage asks us to name our enemies honestly.

An enemy is not only a soldier, criminal, or public persecutor. Sometimes the enemy is the person whose name changes our mood. The family member who wounded us. The colleague who undermined us. The church member who misrepresented us. The person online whose views provoke contempt. The group we quietly believe is beyond grace.

We may not call them enemies.

But our reactions reveal the truth.

Whose failure would secretly please me?

Whose success feels threatening?

Whose pain fails to move me?

Whose name do I use with contempt?

Who do I find easy to reduce to a label?

Who have I stopped praying for?

Jesus does not ask these questions to shame us. He asks them

to free us.

Hatred shrinks the soul. Contempt narrows the heart. Bitterness binds us to the person we resent. We may think we are punishing them, but often we are only allowing their sin to keep shaping our inner life.

Love does not mean pretending the wound did not happen.

Love does not mean trusting an unsafe person.

Love does not mean removing boundaries.

Love does not mean calling injustice acceptable.

But love does mean refusing hatred the right to rule us.

It means we can pray for the person without approving what they did.

It means we can desire their repentance without seeking their ruin.

It means we can speak truth without cruelty.

It means we can protect ourselves or others without surrendering the heart to vengeance.

Jesus calls us to a higher freedom.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to love beyond the circle of comfort.

He invites us to bring Him the names we would rather avoid.

The person who cursed us.

The person who used us.

The person who humiliated us.

The person who never apologised.

The person whose beliefs, behaviour, or character seems impossible to love.

He does not ask us to manufacture emotion. He asks us to begin with surrender.

Bring the resentment to Me.

Bring the wound to Me.

Bring the desire for revenge to Me.

Bring the contempt to Me.

Bring the fear to Me.

Bring the name before My Father.

This may begin with a simple prayer:

"Lord, I cannot love this person rightly without You."

That prayer is not weakness. It is honesty.

Jesus does not command enemy-love because it is easy. He commands it because it reveals the Father. When a disciple loves only those who love him, the world sees nothing unusual. But when a disciple blesses instead of cursing, prays instead of despising, and does good without needing repayment, the character of God becomes visible.

Today, Jesus may be inviting you to one small act of enemy-love.

Pray for the person.

Stop rehearsing the offence.

Refuse the insulting word.

Release the fantasy of revenge.

Do good where wisdom allows.

Ask God to bless them with repentance, healing, truth, and salvation.

That is how the Father has loved us.

That is how His children learn to love.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

You have loved me with mercy I did not deserve.

You have sent kindness into my life even when my heart was far from You. You have been patient with my sin, faithful in my weakness, and generous beyond measure.

Teach me to love as Your child.

Forgive me for the hatred, contempt, bitterness, and revenge I have allowed to live in my heart. Forgive me for loving only those who love me and blessing only those who bless me.

Lord Jesus, give me Your heart toward those who have wounded, opposed, or misunderstood me.

Help me to pray truthfully. Help me to bless sincerely. Help me to do good wisely. Help me to set boundaries without hatred and speak truth without cruelty.

Make my love more like the Father's love.

Amen.

Journal Notes

Who do I find most difficult to love, bless, or pray for?

What happens inside me when I hear that person's name or think about what they did?

Have I confused love with approval, or boundaries with hatred?

Where have I allowed contempt to feel justified?

What would it mean to pray for this person honestly before God?

How does the Father's kindness to the evil and the good reshape my understanding of mercy?

Where is Jesus asking me to bless instead of curse?

What small act of enemy-love can I practise today?



IV

Secret Kingdom Living

Jesus turns from public righteousness to hidden devotion. Giving, prayer, fasting, money, and worry all reveal where the heart truly rests. The Father sees in secret, provides faithfully, and invites His children to live before Him rather than for human approval.

19

Giving in Secret

Scripture
"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.
Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:
That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."
Matthew –6:14

When Jesus Spoke

Jesus now turns from the visible righteousness of the kingdom to the hidden life of the heart.

He has spoken of anger, lust, faithfulness, truth, mercy, and enemy-love. He has shown that the kingdom of heaven does not begin with outward behaviour only. It begins deeper. It reaches into motives, desires, loyalties, and secret thoughts.

Now He speaks about giving.

At first, this may seem like a smaller matter. Giving to the poor is a good thing. Helping the needy is part of true religion. Scripture never treats mercy toward the suffering as optional. Yet Jesus shows that even a good act can be spoiled by a divided heart.

A person may give bread to the hungry and still be feeding pride.

A person may help the poor and still be serving self.

A person may do something generous before men and yet have no living communion with the Father.

This is why Jesus begins with a warning: "Take heed."

The danger is not generosity.

The danger is performance.

The human heart has a strange ability to turn even mercy into a stage. It can use kindness as a mirror. It can give in order to be seen, thanked, admired, praised, or remembered. It can clothe selfishness in religious language and call it service.

Jesus does not condemn giving.

He purifies it.

He calls His disciples away from public religious display into secret kingdom living, where love is offered before the eyes of the Father.

Understanding the Setting

In the world of Jesus' hearers, almsgiving was an important part of religious life. To give to the poor was regarded as an act of righteousness. This was not wrong. The law and the prophets repeatedly called God's people to care for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the vulnerable.

The problem was not that people gave.

The problem was why some gave.

Jesus describes hypocrites who gave "in the synagogues and in the streets" so that they might "have glory of men." Their charity was not hidden mercy flowing from love. It was a public signal of spiritual importance.

They wanted their giving to be noticed.

They wanted their compassion to build their reputation.

They wanted the poor to receive help, but they also wanted themselves to receive honour.

This is the spiritual danger Jesus exposes. Ellen White writes that the Pharisees "paraded their acts of charity before the people in order to attract their attention and gain a reputation for sanctity." She adds that Christ rebuked this ostentation because the admiration they sought was the only reward they would receive.

That warning remains deeply relevant.

Today, the trumpet may not be literal. It may be a photograph, a caption, a public announcement, a carefully framed testimony, a donor wall, a subtle mention in conversation, or the inner need to be recognised as generous.

The setting has changed.

The human heart has not.

Jesus speaks into every age where kindness can become

branding, service can become reputation management, and generosity can become a way of purchasing admiration.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus gives three connected teachings in this passage.

First, He warns against righteousness performed "to be seen."

The issue is not visibility itself. Jesus has already said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." The difference lies in the direction of glory.

In Matthew 5, good works are seen so that the Father is glorified.

In Matthew 6, good works are displayed so that the giver is glorified.

The same outward action may come from two very different hearts.

Second, Jesus says that public praise can become the whole reward.

"They have their reward."

This is one of the most sobering sentences in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus does not say the hypocrites receive no reward. He says they receive exactly the reward they wanted.

They wanted to be seen.

They were seen.

They wanted to be praised.

They were praised.

They wanted honour from people.

They received it.

But that is all.

The Father's reward belongs to those whose love is directed

toward Him and toward the person in need, not toward the applause of observers.

Third, Jesus calls His disciples to hidden simplicity.

"Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

This is a vivid way of describing unselfconscious generosity. Jesus is not giving a mechanical rule that no act of kindness may ever be known by another person. The deeper teaching is that giving should be free from self-admiration.

The right hand gives.

The left hand does not keep record.

The heart does not pause to admire itself.

Love does not step back and say, "Look how generous I am."

True kingdom giving is so surrendered to God that it does not need to become a story about the giver.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals the Father who sees in secret.

That is both searching and comforting.

It is searching because God sees the motive beneath the act. He sees whether generosity is love or performance. He sees whether kindness is offered for His glory or for human applause. He sees the small negotiations of the heart that no one else can detect.

But it is also comforting because God sees the quiet good that no one else notices.

He sees the meal prepared without thanks.

He sees the money given without announcement.

He sees the patient visit, the private sacrifice, the hidden forgiveness, the quiet support, the burden carried for another person when no one claps and no one knows the cost.

The Father is not blind to secret faithfulness.

This matters because many of the holiest acts in ordinary Christian life are not impressive to the world. They do not trend. They are not photographed. They are not rewarded with status. They happen in kitchens, hospital rooms, small churches, family crises, private bank transfers, late-night prayers, and unnoticed acts of mercy.

Jesus tells us that these hidden things are not hidden from God.

The Father sees.

And because He sees, secret love is never wasted.

This passage also reveals that God values sincerity more than display. He is not impressed by religious theatre. He is not moved by spiritual performance. He does not measure generosity only by amount, visibility, or public impact. He looks at the heart.

The kingdom of God is not built by self-advertising goodness.

It is built by love that has become free enough to forget itself.

Looking Within

This teaching asks us to examine not only whether we give, but what we seek when we give.

Do I need people to know the good I have done?

Do I feel disappointed when my sacrifice goes unnoticed?

Do I quietly resent those who do not thank me enough?

Do I use generosity to shape how others see me?

Do I turn service into a way of proving that I am spiritual, kind, mature, or important?

These are not comfortable questions, but they are necessary ones.

Jesus is not trying to shame us. He is trying to free us.

The need to be seen can become a hidden bondage. It makes us dependent on approval. It makes our obedience fragile. If people notice us, we continue. If they ignore us, we withdraw. If they praise us, we feel valuable. If they forget us, we feel used.

But secret kingdom living frees the soul from this restless exchange.

When the Father's gaze is enough, applause loses its power.

When love becomes the motive, recognition becomes secondary.

When Christ is central, the self no longer has to stand in the middle of every good thing we do.

This does not mean that appreciation is wrong. Encouragement is a gift. Gratitude matters. Communities should honour faithful service. But Jesus warns us not to make human recognition the oxygen of obedience.

The disciple must learn to live before God.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us into a quieter kind of righteousness.

Not careless giving.

Not reluctant giving.

Not public performance.

But sincere, Father-facing mercy.

He invites us to give because God has first given to us. He invites us to serve because Christ served us. He invites us to help the suffering not as a way of building our name, but as a way of revealing His love.

This may begin with something simple.

Give without mentioning it.

Help without attaching your name.

Serve without needing the story repeated.

Bless someone who cannot repay you.

Do good where only God can see.

Let the Father train your heart in hidden faithfulness.

The secret place is not only where we pray. It is also where our motives are purified. It is where love becomes real because it no longer depends on being admired.

Jesus is calling His disciples to a life where the Father's presence is enough.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

You see what is hidden.

You see the good that no one notices, and You also see the pride that I often fail to recognise in myself.

Purify my motives.

Teach me to give without needing praise.

Teach me to serve without seeking attention.

Teach me to love because You have loved me first.

Where I have used kindness to build my own name, forgive me.

Where I have grown weary because others did not notice, restore my heart.

Make my life a quiet channel of Your mercy.

Let my good works bring glory to You, not to me.

Help me to live before Your eyes with sincerity, humility, and joy.

Amen.

Journal Notes

What part of this teaching feels most personal to me right now?

Where am I most tempted to seek recognition for the good I do?

How does it change my heart to know that the Father sees in secret?

What is one act of kindness I can do this week without drawing attention to myself?

How can my giving become more sincere, simple, and Christ-centred?



20

The Secret Place of Prayer

Scripture
"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.
But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.
Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."
Matthew –6:58

When Jesus Spoke

Jesus now moves from secret giving to secret prayer.

The subject has changed, but the heart issue remains the same. In the kingdom of heaven, righteousness is not measured only by what is done. It is measured by why it is done, before whom it is done, and whose approval the heart is seeking.

Prayer is one of the holiest acts of the soul.

It is the creature speaking to the Creator.

It is the child coming before the Father.

It is weakness reaching toward strength, guilt reaching toward mercy, emptiness reaching toward fullness, and faith reaching toward the unseen God.

Yet even prayer can be corrupted by pride.

That is the searching power of Jesus' words. He does not only warn against obvious sin. He warns against religious performance. He shows that the human heart can take the very act that should humble us before God and turn it into a way of being admired by people.

Some prayed to be heard by God.

Others prayed to be seen by men.

Jesus calls His disciples away from spiritual theatre and into hidden communion with the Father.

Understanding the Setting

In Jesus' day, public prayer formed part of Jewish religious life. Prayer in the synagogue was not wrong. Prayer with others was not wrong. Jesus Himself prayed with His disciples and in the presence of others. The issue was not public prayer itself, but prayer performed for public admiration.

Ellen White explains that some religious leaders had fixed hours for prayer. If they happened to be in a public place at that time, they would stop in the street or marketplace and recite formal prayers aloud. Jesus rebuked this because such worship was offered for self-glorification rather than communion with God.

The synagogue and the street corner became stages.

The words may have sounded holy.

The posture may have looked reverent.

But the heart was turned sideways, away from God and toward the crowd.

Jesus also warns against "vain repetitions." This does not condemn earnest, repeated prayer. Scripture contains examples of persistent prayer. Jesus Himself prayed repeatedly in Gethsemane. The warning is against empty religious speech, where people imagine that many words can pressure God, impress God, or earn God's attention.

This was common in pagan prayer practices, where worshippers often tried to secure divine favour through repeated formulas, ritual intensity, or lengthy speech.

Jesus reveals something different.

The Father is not reluctant.

The Father is not manipulated by volume.

The Father is not impressed by religious performance.

The Father already knows what His children need before they ask.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus gives His disciples two clear contrasts.

First, He contrasts performed prayer with secret prayer.

The hypocrites pray where they can be seen. Their prayer has an audience, but it is the wrong audience. Their words rise from the lips, but their reward comes from human approval. Jesus says, "They have their reward." They wanted to be seen as spiritual. They were seen. That was the reward they chose.

But the disciple enters the secret place.

"Enter into thy closet."

The "closet" represents the hidden place of sincere communion. It may be a room, a quiet corner, a walk outside, an early morning chair, or any humble place where the soul withdraws from performance and speaks honestly with God.

The point is not the architecture of the room.

The point is the direction of the heart.

Second, Jesus contrasts empty repetition with trusting prayer.

Prayer is not made powerful by many words. It is not made acceptable by polished phrases. It is not heard because the believer knows how to sound spiritual.

Prayer is heard because the Father is merciful.

This changes everything.

Jesus does not say, "Your Father will know what you need if you explain it well enough."

He says, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."

Prayer, then, is not informing an ignorant God. It is not persuading an unwilling God. It is not performing before a distant God.

Prayer is communion with a Father who already knows,

already sees, already cares, and already invites His children to come.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals the tenderness of the Father.

Jesus does not merely command His disciples to pray. He tells them what kind of Father waits for them in the secret place.

He is the Father "which is in secret."

He is the Father "which seeth in secret."

He is the Father who knows what His children need before they ask.

This means that secret prayer is not an attempt to reach a God who is far away. It is a response to a Father who is already near.

Ellen White writes that through Jesus we may come into God's presence "with the confidence of a child" and open our hearts to One who knows and loves us. In the secret place, where no eye but God's can see and no ear but His can hear, the soul may pour out its hidden desires and longings to the Father of infinite pity.

That is the heart of this teaching.

The secret place is not cold duty.

It is not religious isolation.

It is not a punishment.

It is the place where the soul is unmasked before love.

There, we do not need to sound impressive. We do not need to defend ourselves. We do not need to explain everything perfectly. We do not need to compete with the prayers of others. We come as children to the Father.

The Father sees the burdens that cannot be spoken in public.

He sees the grief hidden behind ordinary routines.

He sees the temptation no one else knows about.

He sees the fear beneath the surface.

He sees the longing for forgiveness, direction, healing, courage, and peace.

And He invites us to bring it all to Him.

Looking Within

This teaching asks us to examine the way we pray.

Do I pray differently when others are listening?

Do I use prayer to appear mature, spiritual, or impressive?

Do I neglect private prayer while maintaining public religious language?

Do I measure prayer by length, emotion, eloquence, or visible effect?

Do I truly believe that the Father knows what I need before I ask?

Many believers struggle in the secret place because prayer reveals the true condition of the heart. Public prayer can be controlled. Private prayer cannot be hidden behind religious performance for long. When no one is listening but God, the soul must become honest.

That honesty can feel difficult at first.

Silence may expose restlessness.

Stillness may reveal anxiety.

Secret prayer may uncover how dependent we have become on noise, approval, routine, or distraction.

But Jesus does not call us into the secret place to condemn us.

He calls us there to meet the Father.

The hidden life of prayer slowly reforms the visible life. As we learn to speak with God in secret, we become less dependent

on being seen by people. As we bring our needs before the Father, we become less controlled by fear. As we sit before His mercy, our motives become cleaner. As we look to Christ, we are changed.

Prayer does not merely change circumstances.

Prayer changes the one who prays.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to recover the secret place.

Not as a religious performance.

Not as a burden.

Not as a way to prove devotion.

But as a place of quiet return.

He invites us to shut the door.

To step away from noise.

To stop performing.

To lay down the need to sound spiritual.

To speak to the Father plainly.

The secret place may begin with simple words:

"Father, I am here."

"Father, I need You."

"Father, forgive me."

"Father, teach me."

"Father, help me trust You."

Jesus is not asking for impressive speech. He is inviting sincere communion. The Father already knows what is needed. Prayer does not begin with God's ignorance. It begins with His loving knowledge.

The disciple who learns to pray in secret learns to live before God.

And the life lived before God becomes steady, honest, and free.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Teach me to pray sincerely.

Deliver me from the desire to be seen, admired, or approved by others.

Bring me back to the secret place where I can speak with You honestly.

Forgive me for the times I have used religious words without a surrendered heart.

Forgive me for neglecting private communion while trying to appear faithful outwardly.

Help me to trust that You already know what I need.

Teach me to come to You with the confidence of a child.

Let my prayer life become less about performance and more about relationship.

Shape my heart in Your presence.

Make my hidden life with You the source of my visible life before others.

Amen.

Journal Notes

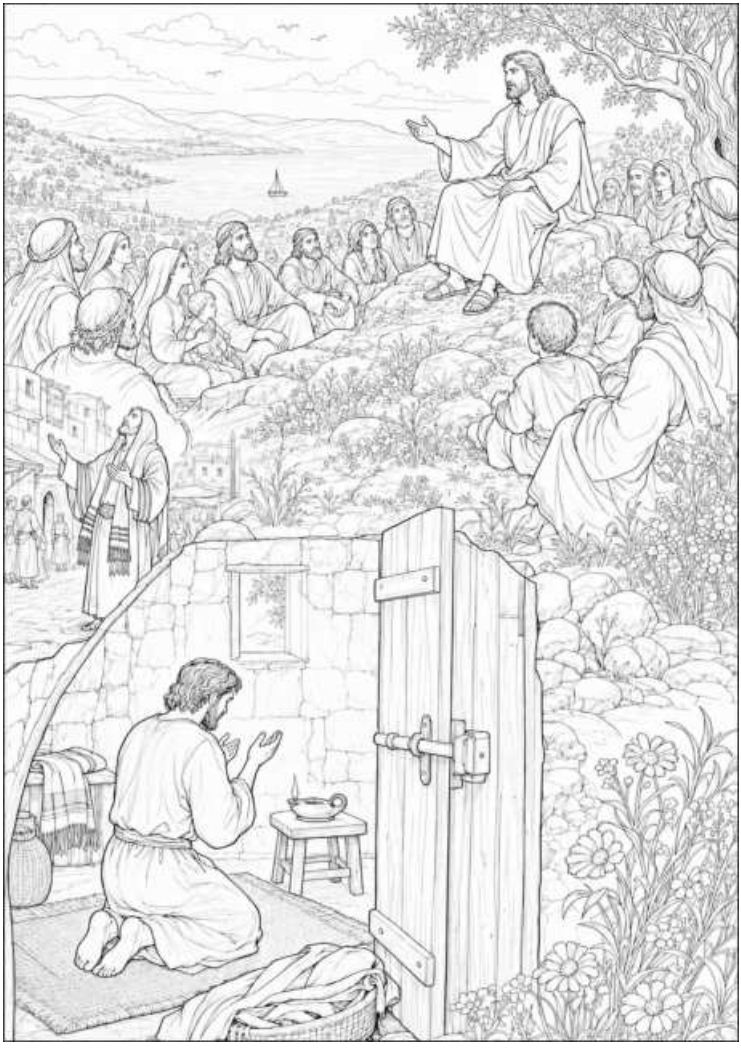
What does my private prayer life reveal about my relationship with the Father?

Where am I most tempted to perform spiritually before others?

What distractions keep me from entering the secret place?

How does it comfort me to know that the Father sees and hears in secret?

What simple rhythm of prayer can I begin this week?



21

The Lords Prayer

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Scripture
"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father
which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is
in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from
evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and
the glory, for ever. Amen."
Matthew —6:913
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When Jesus Spoke

Jesus has just warned His disciples against prayer that performs for people and prayer that tries to impress God with many words. Now He gives them something better.

He does not leave them with a warning only.

He gives them a prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is simple enough for a child to learn, yet deep enough for a lifetime of meditation. It is brief, but nothing essential is missing. It begins with God, moves through His name, His kingdom, and His will, then brings the ordinary needs of human life before the Father: bread, forgiveness, guidance, deliverance, and worship.

This is not merely a form of words.

It is a pattern of life.

In this prayer, Jesus teaches us what the heart of a disciple should desire. He teaches us how to stand before God: not as performers, not as beggars before a reluctant king, and not as strangers trying to earn attention, but as children coming to the Father.

The first word changes everything.

"Our."

The second word changes everything even more.

"Father."

Before we ask for bread, forgiveness, protection, or deliverance, Jesus places us inside a relationship. Prayer begins not with our need, but with God's character. We come because He is Father. We ask because He cares. We worship because He is holy. We surrender because His will is good. We trust because His kingdom cannot fail.

Understanding the Setting

The Lord's Prayer belongs inside the larger movement of Secret Kingdom Living. Jesus has spoken about giving in secret and praying in secret. He has shown that the Father sees what is hidden and knows what His children need before they ask.

Then He says, "After this manner therefore pray ye."

This matters. Jesus is not giving the prayer as a religious performance to be repeated without thought. He has just warned against vain repetitions. He is teaching His disciples the shape of true prayer.

Ellen White notes that the Lord's Prayer was given twice by Jesus: first to the multitude in the Sermon on the Mount, and later to the disciples alone. She describes the disciples observing how Jesus came from long hours with His Father with peace on His face and power in His words and works. Their own need led them to ask, "Lord, teach us to pray."

That setting helps us understand the prayer.

The disciples did not simply want a formula. They wanted the life with God that they saw in Jesus.

They had watched Him minister to the weary, answer the proud, heal the broken, and carry the burdens of the people. Yet His strength did not come from public recognition. It came from communion with the Father.

So when Jesus teaches them to pray, He is inviting them into His own life of trust, surrender, dependence, and worship.

Understanding the Teaching

The prayer begins with God.

"Our Father which art in heaven."

This teaches both nearness and reverence. God is Father, therefore we may come with confidence. God is in heaven, therefore we come with awe. Prayer is not casual speech to an equal, but neither is it fearful speech to a distant ruler. It is the reverent confidence of a child before a holy Father.

"Hallowed be thy name."

To hallow God's name is to honour Him as holy. This is more than speaking His name respectfully, though it includes that. It means desiring that God's character should be honoured in our lives. Ellen White writes that to hallow God's name means we must represent His life and character, and that this is possible only through the grace and righteousness of Christ.

"Thy kingdom come."

The disciple does not pray first for personal success, safety, comfort, or recognition. The disciple prays for the reign of God. This prayer asks that God's kingdom would come in the world, in the church, in the home, and in the heart. It is a prayer for Christ to rule where self has ruled.

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

This is one of the most searching petitions in the prayer. It asks that earth should reflect heaven. It also asks that my heart should stop resisting God. The words are easy to say, but costly to mean. To pray this honestly is to place our plans, fears, relationships, ambitions, and future under the wise government of the Father.

"Give us this day our daily bread."

After worship and surrender, Jesus teaches us to ask for ordinary provision. Bread is simple. It is daily. It is necessary. This petition teaches dependence. We do not live by anxiety, pride, or self-sufficiency. We receive life from God one day at a time.

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

Here Jesus brings us to the mercy of God and the mercy we must extend to others. The forgiven life becomes a forgiving life. We do not purchase forgiveness by forgiving others, but a heart closed to mercy cannot truly receive mercy. This petition teaches honesty before God and humility toward people.

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

The disciple knows his weakness. He does not trust his own strength. He asks the Father for guidance, protection, and deliverance. This is not the prayer of someone who assumes spiritual maturity. It is the prayer of someone who knows that without God's keeping grace, the heart is easily drawn away.

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

The prayer ends where it began: with God. The kingdom is His. The power is His. The glory is His. Prayer does not end in self-focus. It ends in worship.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

The Lord's Prayer reveals the Father who invites His children to bring all of life before Him.

Nothing is too holy to begin with God.

Nothing is too ordinary to bring to God.

His name, kingdom, and will matter.

So does daily bread.

So does guilt.

So does temptation.

So does fear.

This prayer reveals a God who is both majestic and near. He is in heaven, yet He listens to His children on earth. He rules the kingdom, yet He cares about today's bread. He is holy, yet He welcomes sinners to ask for forgiveness. He has all power, yet He stoops to guide weak people away from evil.

The heart of God is not divided.

His holiness does not make Him cold.

His Fatherhood does not make Him small.

His kingdom does not make Him indifferent to personal need.

His glory does not make Him inaccessible.

In the prayer Jesus gives us, we see the Father as He truly is: holy, loving, sovereign, generous, forgiving, protective, and worthy of all worship.

This is why the Lord's Prayer is not merely something to recite. It is something to enter. It teaches the soul to live in the presence of the Father.

It reorders desire.

It takes the heart that is anxious about bread and teaches it to seek the kingdom.

It takes the heart that wants its own way and teaches it to pray for God's will.

It takes the heart that hides guilt and teaches it to ask for forgiveness.

It takes the heart that underestimates temptation and teaches it to ask for deliverance.

It takes the heart that wants control and teaches it to end in worship.

Looking Within

The Lord's Prayer asks us whether our prayers are shaped by the heart of Jesus.

Do I begin with God, or do I begin only with myself?

Do I truly know God as Father, or do I approach Him as though He were distant and reluctant?

Do I hallow His name in my speech, choices, habits, and relationships?

Do I desire His kingdom, or mainly ask Him to bless my own?

Do I surrender to His will only when it agrees with mine?

Do I trust Him for daily bread, or do I live as though everything depends on my ability to control tomorrow?

Do I ask for forgiveness while refusing to extend mercy?

Do I recognise my need for deliverance, or do I trust myself too easily?

These questions are not meant to crush the reader. They are meant to bring the heart back to the Father.

Many of us pray with divided desires. We want God's kingdom, but we also want our own. We want His will, but we fear what surrender may cost. We want daily bread, but we also want guarantees for years ahead. We want forgiveness, but we struggle to release those who have wounded us. We want deliverance from evil, but sometimes we still walk too close to temptation.

Jesus knows this.

That is why He gives us a prayer that reforms us as we pray it.

The Lord's Prayer teaches us to become children again: dependent, honest, trusting, obedient, and open before the Father.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to pray slowly.

Not merely to repeat the words, but to let the prayer examine us.

Say, "Our Father," and remember that you are not an orphan before God.

Say, "which art in heaven," and remember that the One who loves you also reigns over all things.

Say, "Hallowed be thy name," and ask whether your life honours the God you worship.

Say, "Thy kingdom come," and surrender the places where

self still demands the throne.

Say, "Thy will be done," and place even your uncertainty before Him.

Say, "Give us this day our daily bread," and trust Him for today.

Say, "Forgive us our debts," and come honestly with the sins you cannot repair by yourself.

Say, "as we forgive our debtors," and ask for grace to release what bitterness keeps rehearsing.

Say, "Lead us not into temptation," and admit your weakness without shame.

Say, "deliver us from evil," and trust the Father's power to keep you.

Say, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory," and let worship have the final word.

This is the life Jesus invites us into.

A life centred on the Father.

A life surrendered to the kingdom.

A life dependent on daily grace.

A life cleansed by mercy.

A life guarded by God.

A life ending in worship.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven,

Teach me to pray as Jesus taught.

Help me to come to You with reverence, trust, and honesty.

Let Your name be honoured in my life.

Let Your kingdom come in my heart, my home, my church, and my world.

Let Your will be done in me, even where surrender is difficult.

Give me what I need for today, and free me from fear about tomorrow.

Forgive my sins, cleanse my heart, and teach me to forgive others with the mercy I have received from You.

Guide me away from temptation.

Deliver me from evil.

Let my life belong to Your kingdom, rest in Your power, and bring glory to Your name.

Amen.

Journal Notes

What phrase in the Lord's Prayer speaks most directly to my life right now?

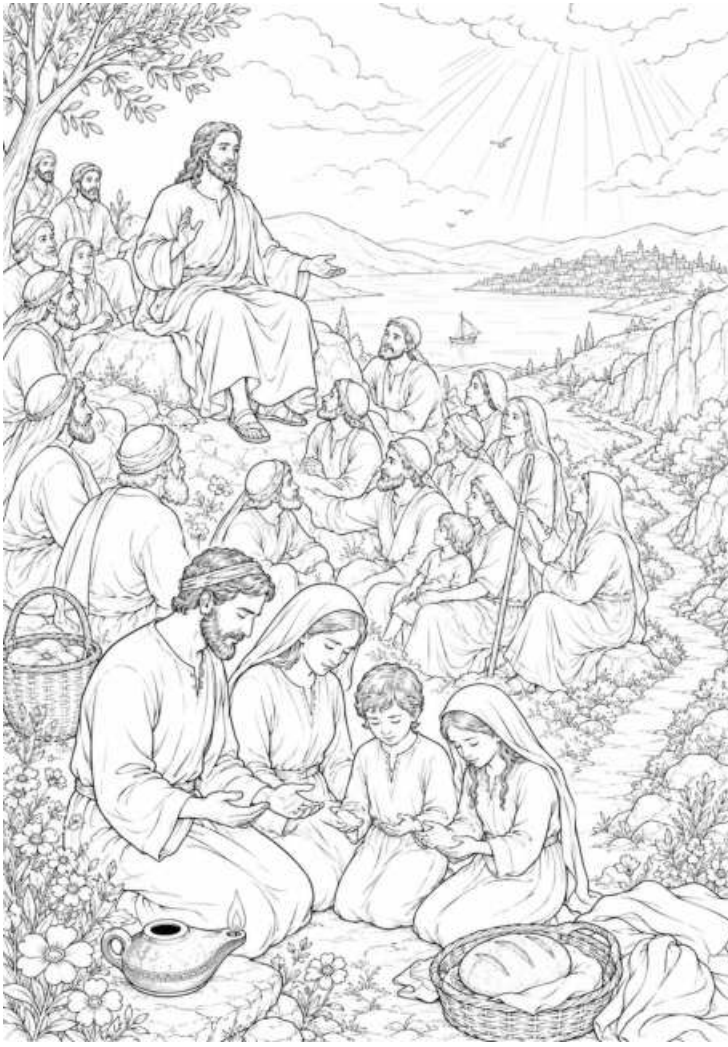
How does calling God "Father" change the way I pray?

Where do I need to surrender more fully to God's will?

What "daily bread" do I need to trust God for today?

Where do I need forgiveness, and where do I need grace to forgive?

How can this prayer shape the way I live this week?



22

Forgiveness

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Scripture
"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your
heavenly Father will also forgive you:
But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither
will your Father forgive your trespasses."
Matthew –6:1415
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When Jesus Spoke

Jesus has just taught His disciples to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

Then, when the prayer is finished, He returns to one part of it.

Not daily bread.

Not deliverance from evil.

Not even the coming kingdom.

He returns to forgiveness.

This should make us pause.

Of all the petitions in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus gives further explanation to the one that concerns our mercy toward others. He knows how easily the human heart asks God for grace while withholding grace from someone else. He knows how naturally we want mercy for ourselves and justice for those who have wounded us.

Forgiveness is not a small matter in the kingdom of heaven.

It stands close to the centre of discipleship because it stands close to the heart of God.

The forgiven person is called to become a forgiving person.

This does not mean that wrongdoing is unimportant. It does not mean that pain is imaginary. It does not mean that trust is instantly restored or that reconciliation is always simple. Jesus never treats evil lightly. The cross itself shows that sin is serious.

But Jesus does teach that the heart which receives mercy from the Father cannot remain closed in bitterness toward others.

Grace received must become grace extended.

Understanding the Setting

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been dealing with righteousness that reaches deeper than outward conduct. He has shown that murder begins in anger, adultery begins in lust, truthfulness must come from the heart, love must reach even enemies, giving must be free from display, and prayer must be sincere before the Father.

Forgiveness belongs to the same hidden kingdom life.

A person may look religious outwardly while carrying resentment inwardly. A person may pray, give, worship, and speak of faith while quietly rehearsing old injuries. The wound may be real. The offence may have been serious. Yet bitterness can

become a hidden throne from which the self refuses to come down.

In *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, Ellen White writes that Jesus teaches we can receive forgiveness from God only as we forgive others. She explains that the love of God draws us to Him, and that same love cannot touch our hearts without creating love toward our brethren.

This does not reduce forgiveness to a cold condition or legal transaction.

It reveals a spiritual reality.

The heart that refuses mercy is closing itself against the very mercy it seeks from God.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus' words are direct:

"If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

This is not because we earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others. Scripture is clear that forgiveness is a gift of grace. We are not pardoned because we have performed enough mercy to deserve pardon.

Rather, Jesus is showing that forgiveness received and forgiveness extended belong together.

An unforgiving heart contradicts the prayer it speaks.

It says, "Father, release me from my debt," while saying to another, "I will never release you from yours."

It says, "Deal gently with me," while saying to another, "I will hold this against you forever."

It says, "Remember Christ's mercy toward me," while saying, "I will remember your failure more than anything else about you."

Jesus exposes that contradiction.

Forgiveness means releasing the claim to personal revenge. It means refusing to make bitterness the keeper of the wound. It means placing the offender, the offence, and the pain into the hands of God.

But forgiveness is not the same as pretending.

It does not call evil good.

It does not erase wise boundaries.

It does not require a wounded person to place themselves back into harm.

It does not remove the need for truth, repentance, justice, discipline, or protection.

Forgiveness concerns the posture of the heart before God. Reconciliation concerns the restoration of relationship, and that requires repentance, truth, and trust rebuilt over time.

Jesus is not asking His disciples to become naïve.

He is asking them to become merciful.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals a Father who forgives.

That is the foundation of the teaching.

God does not ask His children to create mercy from nothing. He first reveals Himself as merciful. He forgives sinners. He receives the repentant. He restores the broken. He does not delight in keeping people chained to their worst failures.

Ellen White writes that forgiveness is broader than many suppose. God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act that frees

us from condemnation. It is "the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart."

This is deeply important.

God's forgiveness does more than cancel guilt.

It heals.

It reclaims.

It recreates.

It begins to make the sinner whole.

When Jesus calls us to forgive, He is not asking us to imitate a shallow pardon. He is inviting us to participate in the Father's own mercy. The Father does not forgive because sin is harmless. He forgives because His love is redemptive. He forgives in a way that opens the door to transformation.

This means forgiveness is not weakness.

It is one of the strongest signs that the life of God is at work in the soul.

The natural heart can remember injury, defend itself, build a case, and demand repayment. Only grace can teach a person to release the debt into God's hands.

The Father who forgives us also frees us from becoming prisoners of what others have done.

Looking Within

This teaching asks us to bring our grudges into the light of God.

Who do I still hold in debt?

Whose name still stirs anger, contempt, or coldness in me?

Where have I confused forgiveness with weakness, and so resisted the mercy Jesus commands?

Where have I asked God for patience with my failures while refusing patience toward another person's failures?

Where am I still rehearsing the injury because I fear that releasing it will make the pain meaningless?

These questions are not easy.

Forgiveness often touches deep places. Some wounds are small irritations. Others are life-altering injuries. Jesus sees the difference. He does not ask us to deny the depth of harm. He invites us to bring that harm into the presence of the Father.

Sometimes forgiveness begins not with warm feeling, but with a surrendered prayer:

"Father, I cannot carry this rightly without You."

"Father, I give up my right to revenge."

"Father, teach me to want mercy more than bitterness."

"Father, protect me from evil, but do not let hatred rule me."

This may be the work of a moment.

It may also be the work of a long season.

Forgiveness is sometimes a decision made before the emotions have caught up. It is sometimes repeated in prayer each time the memory returns. It is sometimes strengthened by wise counsel, honest lament, and healthy boundaries.

But the direction is clear.

The disciple of Jesus cannot make peace with bitterness.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to live as forgiven people.

He invites us to stop measuring others only by what they owe us and to begin seeing them in the light of the mercy we ourselves have received.

This does not mean every relationship will return to what it was.

Some relationships require distance.

Some require careful boundaries.

Some require repentance before trust can be restored.

Some may never be safe enough for close fellowship again.

But even then, Jesus calls the heart away from revenge and into freedom.

Forgiveness places judgment where it belongs: in the hands of God.

It allows the wounded heart to say:

"I will not deny what happened."

"I will not call evil good."

"I will not pretend there was no pain."

"But I will not let bitterness become my master."

"I will entrust justice, mercy, and final judgment to God."

This is not natural.

It is kingdom life.

And Jesus does not merely command it from a distance. He lived it. At the cross, while human cruelty reached its darkest expression, He prayed, "Father, forgive them." The One who commands forgiveness is the One who purchased forgiveness with His own blood.

He knows the cost.

He also knows the freedom.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for Your mercy toward me.

You have forgiven more than I can fully understand.

You have carried my guilt, received my confession, and offered me grace through Jesus Christ.

Teach me to forgive as one who has been forgiven.

Where I am holding bitterness, soften my heart.

Where I am confusing forgiveness with pretending, give me wisdom.

Where I need boundaries, give me courage.

Where I need to release revenge, give me grace.

Do not let old wounds rule my spirit.

Do not let resentment close my heart to Your mercy.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Let Your forgiving love flow through me.

Amen.

Journal Notes

Who comes to mind when I read Jesus' words about forgiveness?

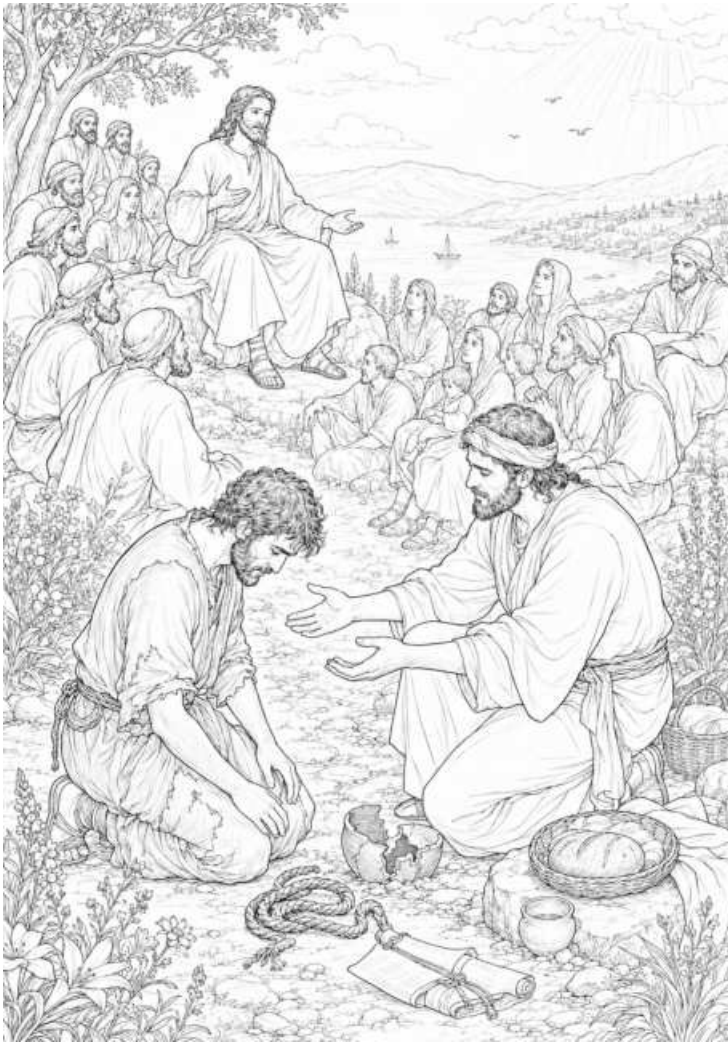
What debt am I still trying to collect from someone emotionally?

How has God shown mercy to me?

What would forgiveness look like in this situation without denying truth or removing wise boundaries?

What prayer can I begin praying for the person who wounded me?

Where do I need to ask someone else for forgiveness?



23

Fasting Before God

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Scripture
"Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of
a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces,
that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say
unto you, They have their reward.
But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and
wash thy face;
That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy
Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which
seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."
Matthew –6:1618
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When Jesus Spoke

Jesus now speaks about fasting.

He has already addressed giving and prayer. In both, He has exposed the danger of religious performance. Now He turns to another sacred practice and gives the same searching warning.

Fasting can be holy.

Fasting can also become theatre.

A person may deny the body while feeding pride. A person may appear spiritually serious while secretly craving admiration. A person may abstain from food, yet remain full of self.

Jesus does not reject fasting. His words assume that His disciples will fast: "when ye fast." But He refuses to let fasting become a public display of religious intensity.

This is important because fasting touches something deep in human nature. Food is ordinary, daily, and necessary. To fast is to feel need in the body and bring that need before God. It can humble the soul. It can sharpen prayer. It can help the believer recognise spiritual hunger more clearly.

But if the heart turns fasting into a way of being seen, the practice loses its spiritual purpose.

The body may be empty.

The self may still be full.

Jesus calls His disciples away from visible gloom and into hidden surrender before the Father.

Understanding the Setting

In biblical faith, fasting was often connected with repentance, mourning, prayer, and urgent dependence on God. It was not merely a private wellness practice or a mark of discipline. It was a way of humbling oneself before God.

But by the time of Jesus, some used fasting as a public sign of religious seriousness. They made their faces look sorrowful. They neglected ordinary grooming. They wanted others to notice the sacrifice.

Their fasting became a message:

Look how devoted I am.

Look how serious I am.

Look how much I suffer for God.

Jesus calls this hypocrisy.

The problem was not that they fasted. The problem was that they wanted fasting to become a visible badge of holiness.

Ellen White writes that true fasting is "something more than a form." It is not merely refusing food, wearing sackcloth, or sprinkling ashes on the head. The one who fasts in real sorrow for sin will not court display.

This distinction matters.

Outward religion can imitate almost anything. It can imitate generosity. It can imitate prayer. It can imitate repentance. It can even imitate humility.

But God sees the hidden motive.

Jesus tells His disciples to anoint the head and wash the face. In other words, do not advertise the fast. Do not make spiritual discipline a performance. Do not turn private surrender into public reputation.

Let the Father see what is meant for the Father.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus' teaching on fasting has three clear movements.

First, He warns against visible religious misery.

"Be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance."

These people wanted their discomfort to be noticed. They used a sorrowful appearance to create a religious impression. Their fasting was no longer directed toward God. It was directed toward observers.

Jesus does not honour this.

He says, "They have their reward."

As with giving and prayer, the reward they wanted is the reward they received. They wanted people to see them as devout. People saw them. That was all.

Second, Jesus calls for hidden sincerity.

"Anoint thine head, and wash thy face."

This does not mean fasting must never be connected with grief or repentance. Scripture shows that fasting can accompany deep sorrow. But Jesus is teaching His disciples not to manufacture an appearance of sorrow for spiritual recognition.

The disciple does not need to look impressive.

The disciple needs to be honest before God.

Third, Jesus points again to the Father who sees in secret.

"That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret."

This is the centre of the teaching. Fasting is not primarily about what the body lacks. It is about where the heart turns. True fasting creates space for dependence, confession, prayer, and renewed surrender.

Ellen White explains that the fast God calls His people to keep is not to afflict the body for the sin of the soul, but to help them perceive the grievous character of sin, humble the heart before God, and receive His pardoning grace.

That is the heart of Christian fasting.

It is not self-punishment.

It is not spiritual display.

It is not an attempt to purchase God's favour.

It is the body and soul together turning from self toward God.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals the Father who receives hidden surrender.

He does not need outward misery to be convinced of our seriousness. He does not ask His children to perform sorrow. He does not reward religious display. He sees the quiet turning of the heart.

This is deeply comforting.

Many sincere acts of devotion happen where no one can see. A believer may quietly fast while carrying a burden for a child, a marriage, a church, a decision, a temptation, a grief, or a longing for deeper communion with God. There may be no announcement. No one may know. Yet the Father sees.

He sees the hunger that becomes prayer.

He sees the weakness that becomes dependence.

He sees the repentance that words cannot fully express.

He sees the private surrender that changes the direction of a life.

This passage also reveals that the Father is not honoured by gloomy religion. Ellen White writes that whatever is done to the glory of God should be done with cheerfulness, not sadness and gloom. She warns that if Christians present religion as mournful, they misrepresent the character of Christ.

That insight is important for this chapter.

Jesus does not call His disciples into a heavy, joyless faith. He calls them into sincere devotion before a compassionate Father.

Fasting may involve self-denial, but it should not make God appear harsh.

Fasting may involve repentance, but it should not make grace appear absent.

Fasting may involve hunger, but it should deepen our longing

for the One who satisfies the soul.

The Father who sees in secret is not looking for performance.

He is looking for the heart.

Looking Within

This teaching asks us to examine the way we practise spiritual discipline.

Do I want others to know when I am sacrificing?

Do I feel more spiritual when my discipline is noticed?

Do I use seriousness, tiredness, or visible strain to signal devotion?

Do I confuse self-denial with self-punishment?

Do I believe that God is pleased by outward hardship even when my heart remains distant?

These are searching questions because performance can hide inside discipline.

A person can fast and still remain proud.

A person can abstain and still remain unmerciful.

A person can appear serious and still avoid repentance.

A person can deny food and still feed resentment, vanity, control, or self-righteousness.

Jesus is not calling us to despise fasting. He is calling us to recover its true purpose.

Fasting should help the heart turn toward God.

It should make us more aware of our need, not more impressed with our strength.

It should make us more humble, not more superior.

It should deepen prayer, not replace obedience.

It should open the soul to grace, not become a way of earning grace.

In a world of constant appetite, fasting can become a powerful act of worship. It teaches the body that it is not master. It teaches the soul that bread alone cannot sustain life. It helps expose what controls us. It makes space for prayer.

But Jesus insists that this holy work must remain before the Father.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to fast before God, not before people.

He invites us into a form of devotion that does not need to be advertised. This may mean fasting from food for a time, where health and wisdom allow. It may also mean setting aside other appetites that crowd the soul: noise, entertainment, social media, unnecessary spending, constant distraction, or any comfort that has begun to rule the heart.

The principle remains the same.

Step back from what feeds the flesh so that the heart may turn more fully toward God.

But do it before the Father.

Do it quietly.

Do it sincerely.

Do it with humility.

Do it as someone seeking grace, not as someone displaying strength.

Jesus' instruction to "wash thy face" is tender in its own way. He is telling His disciples not to make their devotion burdensome to others. Do not make the people around you carry the drama of your sacrifice. Do not make holiness look bitter.

Let the hidden struggle be revealed to the compassionate Saviour.

Leave the burden at the foot of the cross.

Then go on your way in the love of the One who first loved you.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Teach me the meaning of true fasting.

Deliver me from religious performance.

Deliver me from the desire to appear devoted before others.

Show me where appetite, comfort, pride, or distraction has gained too much power in my life.

Help me to turn from self to Christ.

When I fast, let it humble my heart before You.

Let it deepen prayer, awaken repentance, and open my soul to Your grace.

Keep me from gloom, self-pity, and spiritual pride.

Teach me to serve You with sincerity and quiet joy.

Let what is hidden before You bear fruit in a life that reflects the love of Jesus.

Amen.

Journal Notes

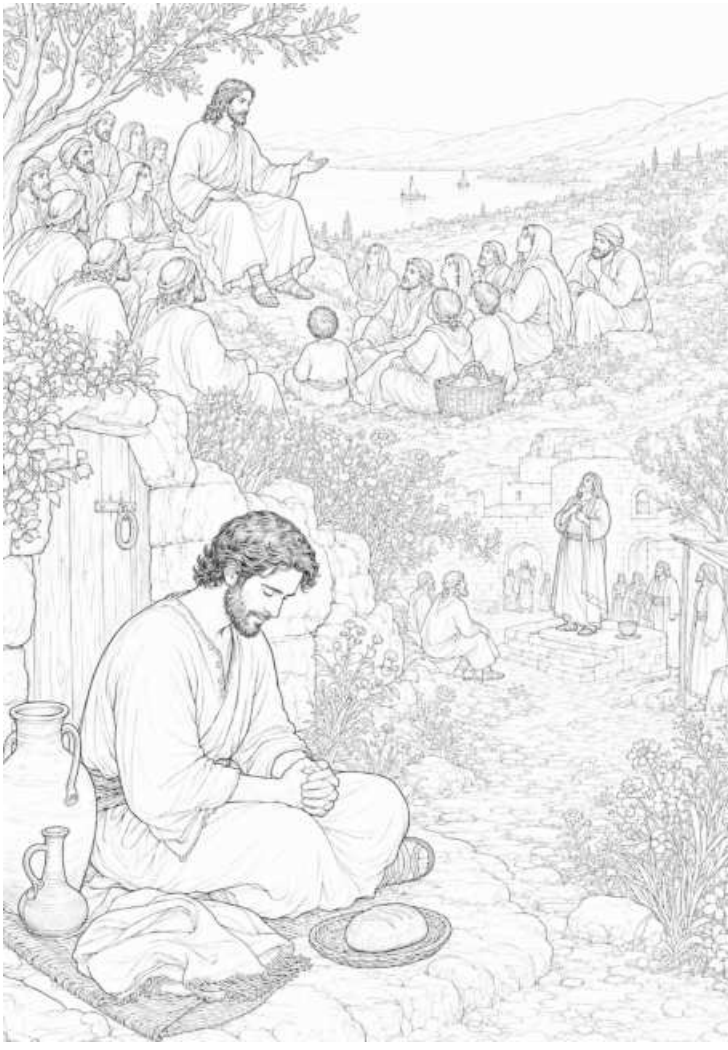
What does fasting reveal about my appetites, habits, and dependence on God?

Where am I tempted to make spiritual discipline visible for the approval of others?

What burden, sin, decision, or longing might I bring before God through fasting and prayer?

How can I practise self-denial without becoming gloomy, proud, or harsh?

What is one appetite or distraction I may need to set aside for a time so that I can seek God more clearly?



24

Treasures in Heaven

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Scripture
"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,
where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves
break through and steal:
But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where
neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves
do not break through nor steal:
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be
also.
The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine
eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.
But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be
full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in
thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!
No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate
the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to
the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God
and mammon."
Matthew —6:1924
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When Jesus Spoke

Jesus has been speaking about the hidden life.

He has warned His disciples about giving, praying, and fasting for the eyes of men. Now He moves deeper still. He speaks about treasure.

Treasure is not only what a person owns. It is what a person values. It is what the heart protects, pursues, fears losing, and quietly trusts. A treasure may be money, property, reputation, comfort, success, security, influence, beauty, approval, or control.

Jesus does not begin with the hand.

He begins with the heart.

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

That sentence is both simple and searching. The heart follows what it treasures. We may say that God is first, but our fears, choices, spending, habits, ambitions, and anxieties often reveal where our treasure truly lies.

Jesus does not condemn provision, work, planning, or wise stewardship. He does not call His disciples to carelessness. He calls them away from worshipping what cannot last.

Earthly treasure is fragile.

Moth can eat it.

Rust can corrupt it.

Thieves can steal it.

Time can take it.

Death can separate us from it.

The kingdom of heaven teaches us to live for what cannot be destroyed.

Understanding the Setting

In the ancient world, wealth was often stored in forms that were vulnerable. Fine garments could be ruined by moths. Stored goods could decay. Metal treasures could corrode. Houses were not protected by modern security systems; thieves could dig through mud-brick walls and steal what had been hidden.

Jesus' hearers understood this immediately.

They knew what it meant to lose what they had worked for. They knew the uncertainty of harvests, taxes, sickness, political instability, and poverty. Yet the warning was not only for the poor who feared not having enough. It was also for the wealthy who trusted what they had gathered.

Ellen White writes that treasure laid up on earth "will not endure," and that earthly treasure can engross the mind "to the exclusion of heavenly things." She also warns that worldliness can take the place of God and religion in the soul.

That is the danger Jesus names.

Earthly treasure does not merely sit in a chest.

It can sit on the throne of the heart.

It can shape what we notice, what we fear, what we pursue, and what we become. This is why Jesus joins treasure, vision, and mastery in one teaching. What we treasure affects how we see. How we see affects whom we serve.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus gives three connected teachings.

First, earthly treasure is insecure.

He does not say it might fail. He says it is exposed to corruption and loss. Anything placed within the reach of moth, rust, thief,

decay, market, accident, sickness, or death cannot become the final resting place of the heart.

This is not a rejection of material things. It is a warning against ultimate trust in material things.

Second, heavenly treasure is secure.

"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."

This does not mean earning salvation. It means living in such a way that our lives are invested in God's kingdom. Heavenly treasure is formed when love, faith, obedience, mercy, generosity, truth, prayer, sacrifice, and service are offered to God.

Ellen White describes heavenly treasure as imperishable because it is "in the keeping of God." She also writes that the treasure Christ esteems as precious is "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints," and that Christ looks upon His people as the reward of His sufferings and love.

This is a remarkable thought.

Heavenly treasure is not merely a future reward stored somewhere far away. It includes people redeemed by Christ, character formed by grace, and work done in union with Him.

Third, the heart follows the treasure.

This is the centre of the passage. We often imagine that our heart chooses our treasure. Jesus shows the reverse is also true: our treasure trains our heart.

If we treasure comfort, our heart becomes anxious whenever comfort is threatened.

If we treasure money, our heart becomes restless, calculating, and afraid.

If we treasure reputation, our heart becomes dependent on human approval.

If we treasure control, our heart becomes troubled by uncertainty.

If we treasure Christ, our heart is drawn toward what is eternal.

This leads into Jesus' words about the eye. The "single" eye is clear, undivided, and rightly focused. It receives light because it is directed toward God. The "evil" eye is clouded by divided desire. It sees everything through selfishness, greed, fear, or envy.

Then Jesus makes the final contrast plain:

"No man can serve two masters."

God and mammon cannot share the throne.

Mammon is not only money. It is wealth treated as master, security treated as saviour, and earthly gain treated as ultimate good. Jesus does not say it is difficult to serve both God and mammon. He says it is impossible.

The heart will finally cling to one and despise the other.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals a Father who wants His children free.

At first, Jesus' warning may sound severe. But beneath it is mercy. He knows what earthly treasure does to the soul. He knows how easily people become burdened by what they own, anxious over what they lack, proud of what they possess, and afraid of what they might lose.

He knows that a life built on perishable treasure becomes a life haunted by insecurity.

So He calls us to treasure what cannot be taken.

God is not trying to impoverish the heart.

He is trying to rescue it from false wealth.

The Father offers a treasure that moth cannot eat, rust cannot corrupt, thieves cannot steal, and death cannot remove. He offers Himself. He offers His kingdom. He offers the life of

Christ in the soul. He offers fellowship with Him, transformed character, eternal inheritance, and the joy of participating in His redemptive work.

This means that heavenly treasure is not cold or abstract.

It is deeply personal.

Every act of mercy done in Christ's name matters.

Every quiet sacrifice offered to God matters.

Every person loved, served, encouraged, restored, or led closer to Jesus matters.

Every victory of grace in the heart matters.

The Father sees these things. He keeps them. He does not forget.

Jesus is teaching us that the safest place for the heart is not in possessions, status, or worldly certainty. The safest place for the heart is with God.

Looking Within

This teaching asks us to examine what we are really storing up.

What do I most fear losing?

What occupies my thoughts when my mind is free?

What do I believe would make me finally secure?

What do I sacrifice most for?

What has the power to disturb my peace most quickly?

Where do my money, time, energy, and attention reveal my treasure to be?

These questions can be uncomfortable because treasure often hides beneath respectable language. We may call it responsibility, planning, ambition, protection, or wisdom. Sometimes it is exactly that. But sometimes our carefulness becomes fear. Our ambition becomes worship. Our provision becomes control. Our

stewardship becomes attachment.

Jesus does not ask us to hate the earthly gifts of God.

He asks us not to make them gods.

A home is a gift, but it cannot be our heaven.

Money is useful, but it cannot be our master.

Work is honourable, but it cannot be our identity.

Reputation may be helpful, but it cannot be our righteousness.

Comfort may be received with gratitude, but it cannot become the goal of life.

The disciple must learn to hold earthly things with open hands.

This does not make life poorer.

It makes love purer.

When God is our treasure, we can receive His gifts without being ruled by them. We can work without worshipping success. We can own without being owned. We can give without feeling diminished. We can lose without being destroyed.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to move our treasure.

This is not merely a financial instruction. It is a whole-life invitation.

Move your hope from what can fail to what cannot fail.

Move your confidence from possessions to the Father.

Move your identity from achievement to Christ.

Move your security from earthly accumulation to heavenly inheritance.

Move your attention from self-preservation to kingdom service.

This may begin very practically.

Give more freely.

Simplify where possessions have begun to possess you.

Use money as a servant, not a master.

Invest in people.

Practise generosity quietly.

Choose obedience when it costs something.

Let Christ reshape your desires.

Ask the Father to show you where mammon has been whispering promises only God can fulfil.

Jesus is not calling us into emptiness.

He is calling us into better treasure.

The heart was made for God. Nothing less can keep it.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Show me where my treasure truly is.

Search my heart and reveal what I have trusted, protected, pursued, or feared losing more than You.

Forgive me for storing up earthly things as though they could save me.

Forgive me for allowing money, comfort, approval, success, or control to rule my heart.

Teach me to lay up treasure in heaven.

Give me a clear and single eye.

Free me from divided loyalties.

Help me to use earthly things wisely without being mastered by them.

Make Christ my greatest treasure.

Let my time, choices, work, giving, and love reflect Your kingdom.

Keep my heart where moth, rust, thieves, and death cannot reach it.

Amen.

Journal Notes

What earthly treasure most easily captures my heart?

What does my use of money, time, and attention reveal about what I value most?

Where am I tempted to seek security apart from God?

What would it look like for me to lay up treasure in heaven this week?

How can I use what God has entrusted to me to bless others and serve His kingdom?

Where do I need to choose God over mammon in a practical way?


"Do not store up
for yourselves treasures
on earth, where moths
and vermin destroy,
and where thieves break
in and steal. But store up
for yourselves treasures
in heaven, where moths
and vermin do not destroy,
and where thieves
do not break in and steal.
For where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also."
— MATTHEW 6:19–21

25

The Birds and the Lilies

Scripture
"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.
Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?
Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.
Are ye not much better than they?
Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?
And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:
And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

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Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat?
or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be
clothed?
For after all these things do the Gentiles seek: for
your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all
these things.
But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his
righteousness; and all these things shall be added
unto you.
Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the
morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.
Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."
Matthew –6:2534
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When Jesus Spoke

Jesus has just said that no one can serve two masters.

A person cannot serve God and mammon. The heart cannot belong fully to the Father while trusting earthly provision as its master. Now Jesus turns to the anxiety that often grows from that divided loyalty.

"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life."

He is not speaking against responsible work, wise planning, or ordinary care for the body. Birds still search for food. Lilies still grow from the soil. People still labour, prepare, sow, reap, cook, clothe, and provide. Jesus is not commending idleness.

He is confronting anxious unbelief.

He speaks to the heart that lives as though everything depends on its own ability to secure tomorrow. He speaks to the mind that rehearses possible losses until peace disappears. He speaks to the soul that knows God as doctrine, but struggles to trust

Him as Father.

The birds and the lilies become His witnesses.

They preach without words.

The birds do not build barns, yet the Father feeds them.

The lilies do not weave garments, yet the Father clothes them with beauty beyond Solomon's glory.

If the Father cares for birds and flowers, will He forget His children?

That is the question Jesus places before every anxious heart.

Understanding the Setting

Jesus taught these words on a Galilean hillside. Around Him were ordinary people who knew the pressure of daily survival. Many were not wealthy. Food, clothing, shelter, tax burdens, poor harvests, sickness, and political uncertainty were not abstract concerns. For many in the crowd, tomorrow's bread was a real question.

This makes Jesus' words tender, not dismissive.

He does not speak from comfort to shame the struggling. He speaks as the Son who knows the Father. He draws His hearers' eyes away from fear and toward the visible signs of God's care around them.

Ellen White notes that Jesus pointed His hearers to the birds as they sang, free from burdensome care, and reminded them that the Father provides for their needs. She also describes the hillside and fields bright with flowers as Jesus called attention to the lilies, showing that every blossom owes its life to the same power that governs the stars.

The lesson is rooted in what the people could see.

Birds in the air.

Flowers in the field.

Grass underfoot.

The morning world alive with the Father's care.

Jesus uses creation to correct the imagination. Anxiety narrows the world until only lack, threat, and uncertainty remain. Jesus opens the world again. He asks His disciples to look carefully at what God has made.

"Behold."

"Consider."

Faith is not blind to reality. Faith looks more deeply at reality because it sees the Father's hand within it.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus gives several connected reasons why anxiety must not rule the disciple.

First, life is more than material provision.

"Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"

Food and clothing matter. Jesus does not deny that. But life is greater than the things that sustain it. If the Father has given life itself, can He not also care for the needs of life? The greater gift is evidence that the lesser need is not forgotten.

Second, the Father feeds the birds.

Birds do not sow, reap, or gather into barns. Yet they are not outside God's care. Jesus does not say that birds do nothing. He says they do not live under the illusion of anxious control. Their existence bears witness to divine provision.

Then Jesus asks, "Are ye not much better than they?"

This is not contempt for creation. It is assurance of human value. The Father cares for birds, but human beings bear a value that birds do not. They are made in God's image. They are

objects of Christ's redeeming love.

Third, anxiety cannot add life.

"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?"

Anxiety promises usefulness, but often produces helplessness. It feels like action, but it cannot finally control life. It cannot lengthen the body, secure the future, or master tomorrow. It can consume strength without producing peace.

Fourth, the Father clothes the lilies.

The lilies neither toil nor spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them. Human splendour, even at its highest, cannot equal the quiet beauty God gives to a flower.

Ellen White writes that God has filled earth, air, and sky with beauty to tell us of His loving thought for us. She adds that if God has given such care to the things of nature for our happiness and joy, we should not doubt that He will give every needed blessing.

Fifth, the Father knows.

"Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

This is the heart of the passage.

The disciple does not live before an indifferent God. The Father knows the need before the prayer is spoken, before the money arrives, before the cupboard is full, before the problem is solved.

Sixth, the kingdom must come first.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness."

Jesus does not merely say, "Stop worrying." He gives the heart a better centre. Anxiety often grows where survival has become supreme. Jesus calls the disciple to place the kingdom first: God's reign, God's righteousness, God's will, God's character, God's purposes.

When the Father becomes first, daily needs return to their

proper place.

They matter.

But they are not master.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals the Father's attentive care.

He feeds.

He clothes.

He knows.

He values.

He provides.

He is not distant from ordinary human need. He is not concerned only with "spiritual" matters while daily bread, clothing, work, bills, health, and tomorrow's burdens are beneath His notice. Jesus teaches that the Father sees the whole life of His child.

The same God who calls us to seek His kingdom also knows that bodies need food and clothing.

This is not a small revelation.

Many people imagine God as concerned mainly with religious performance, doctrinal correctness, or public obedience. Jesus reveals the Father who notices birds, clothes flowers, and knows the needs of His children.

He is holy, but not cold.

He is sovereign, but not careless.

He is majestic, but not removed.

He is Father.

The birds and lilies reveal more than provision. They reveal generosity. God could have made creation functional only. Instead, He filled it with song, colour, fragrance, movement,

and beauty. The world is not merely supplied. It is adorned.

This tells us something about His heart.

The Father does not only give what keeps life going. He gives signs of tenderness along the way. A bird's song and a lily's beauty become small witnesses that God's care is not mechanical. It is personal, wise, and kind.

To the anxious disciple, Jesus says: look again.

Creation is not silent.

It is telling you that your Father knows.

Looking Within

This teaching asks us to examine our anxieties before God.

What do I worry about most often?

What future fear keeps returning to my mind?

Where do I live as though everything depends entirely on me?

What need feels too ordinary, too practical, or too material to bring honestly before the Father?

Where have I allowed tomorrow to steal strength from today?

Anxiety often feels responsible. It can even sound wise. It tells us that if we stop worrying, everything will fall apart. But Jesus shows that worry is not the same as faithfulness.

Faithfulness does today's duty.

Anxiety tries to carry tomorrow's burden.

Faithfulness works, prays, plans, and obeys.

Anxiety imagines a future without the Father.

This is why Jesus ends with today.

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

He does not deny that each day has trouble. He refuses to let tomorrow's trouble colonise today's grace.

God gives strength for the day we are in.

Not for every imagined day ahead.

Not for every possible crisis.

Not for every fear the mind can invent.

Today has its own need. Today also has its own mercy.

The disciple learns to live one day at a time under the Father's care.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to seek first the kingdom.

This is the practical centre of the passage.

He does not ask us to pretend we have no needs. He asks us to put our needs under the rule of the Father.

Seek first God's kingdom when money is tight.

Seek first God's righteousness when pressure rises.

Seek first the Father's will when tomorrow feels uncertain.

Seek first Christ when your heart wants to run ahead into fear.

This may begin with a simple practice.

When anxiety rises, pause.

Look at what God has made.

Behold the birds.

Consider the lilies.

Remember that the Father feeds and clothes what is far less valuable than the soul Christ came to redeem.

Then return to today's obedience.

Do the next faithful thing.

Pray the next honest prayer.

Make the next wise decision.

Carry the next real responsibility.

Leave tomorrow with God until tomorrow becomes today.

The Father who knows what you need is already there.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

You know what I need before I ask.

You see the fears I carry, the burdens I hide, and the tomorrows I try to control.

Forgive me for living as though I am alone.

Forgive me for letting anxiety become my master.

Teach me to behold the birds and consider the lilies.

Teach me to trust Your care in ordinary things.

Help me to work faithfully without worrying fearfully.

Help me to plan wisely without trying to control what belongs to You.

Give me today's bread.

Give me today's strength.

Give me today's obedience.

Above all, teach me to seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness.

Let my heart rest in the care of my heavenly Father.

Amen.

Journal Notes

What anxiety most often pulls my heart away from trust?

How does Jesus' teaching about the birds and lilies challenge my view of the Father?

Where do I need to distinguish faithful responsibility from fearful control?

What would it look like for me to seek first God's kingdom in my present situation?

What is one "tomorrow burden" I need to place into the Father's hands today?

How can I practise noticing God's care in creation this week?



V

Kingdom Relationships

The kingdom reshapes how we see others. Jesus calls His followers away from harsh judgement, careless speech, and shallow religion into humility, discernment, prayer, and mercy. The heart that has received grace must learn to extend grace.

26

Judge Not

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Scripture
"Judge not, that ye be not judged.
For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged:
and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured
to you again.
And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy
brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is
in thine own eye?
Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out
the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in
thine own eye?
Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine
own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out
the mote out of thy brother's eye."
Matthew –7:15
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When Jesus Spoke

There is a kind of religion that becomes very skilled at seeing what is wrong with other people.

It notices weakness quickly.

It names faults easily.

It compares, measures, corrects, and condemns.

At first, it may even appear serious about holiness. It may speak with strong conviction. It may use Scripture. It may believe it is defending truth. But beneath the surface, something dangerous can happen. The soul can begin to stand where only God should stand.

Jesus saw this danger clearly.

He had already spoken about anger, lust, retaliation, religious performance, earthly treasure, anxiety, and divided loyalty. He had searched the hidden places of the human heart. Now, as He continued teaching on the mountainside, He turned to the way people treat one another.

"Judge not," He said.

These words were not spoken to remove truth. Jesus was not asking His followers to ignore sin, abandon discernment, or pretend that right and wrong do not matter. In the same sermon, He would soon warn against false prophets and teach His disciples to recognise people by their fruits. He was not forbidding spiritual clarity.

He was forbidding the proud, condemning spirit that places self above another person.

He was warning against the heart that sees another person's fault but does not tremble before its own need of mercy.

Understanding the Setting

The religious world in which Jesus spoke was deeply shaped by visible standards.

The scribes and Pharisees had developed detailed rules around religious life. Their intention may have appeared protective, but the result was often spiritual pride. Human rules became measures of righteousness. People were judged not only by God's commandments, but by human traditions, social expectations, and religious reputation.

Ellen White describes this spirit as one that turned attention away from God and towards self. When people measured others by their own opinions, interpretations, and standards, they became "self-centered judges and petty spies."

This is the atmosphere Jesus confronted.

People were not merely discerning between truth and error. They were judging motives. They were placing themselves over matters of conscience. They were condemning those who did not meet their religious ideal.

Into that atmosphere, Jesus spoke words that still expose the heart:

"Judge not, that ye be not judged."

The command is simple, but it reaches deeply. It asks more than restraint of speech. It asks for humility before God.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus does not say, "Do not think."

He does not say, "Do not discern."

He does not say, "Do not care about righteousness."

He says, "Judge not."

The judgement He forbids is the spirit that assumes God's seat. It is the spirit that looks at another person from above rather than beside them. It is the habit of turning personal opinion into divine law. It is the confidence that says, "I can see clearly what is wrong with you," while remaining blind to what is wrong in me.

Jesus gives a reason:

"With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged."

This is a solemn mercy. God is warning us that the measure we use on others reveals the measure living in our own hearts. A harsh person often reveals a harsh inner world. A suspicious person often reveals an unhealed fear. A condemning person often reveals a soul that has not fully rested in grace.

Then Jesus gives one of the most memorable pictures in the Sermon on the Mount.

A person sees a speck in another's eye, but has a beam in his own.

The image is almost startling. A small particle is lodged in one person's eye, while the one offering help has a large piece of timber in his own. Jesus wants His listeners to feel the absurdity. The problem is not that the speck is imaginary. There may truly be something in the brother's eye. But the helper cannot see clearly enough to help.

His own vision is obstructed.

This is why Jesus says, "First cast out the beam out of thine own eye."

The order matters.

First, self-examination.

First, repentance.

First, humility.

First, grace received personally.

Then, and only then, helpful correction.

Jesus does not end by saying the speck should remain. He says that after the beam is removed, the person will "see clearly" to help the brother. The goal is not indifference. The goal is restoration.

Judgement condemns from a distance.

Love draws near to heal.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals a God who alone sees perfectly.

Human beings see fragments. We see behaviour, tone, patterns, and consequences. These things matter, but they are not the whole person. We do not see every wound, fear, motive, memory, temptation, or silent battle. We do not know the full story of another soul.

God does.

And the One who sees fully is also the One who deals tenderly.

This is the wonder of God's judgement. His judgement is not impulsive, petty, insecure, or self-protective. He does not need to prove His superiority. He does not condemn in order to hide His own fault, for there is no fault in Him. His judgement is holy because His heart is holy.

Jesus reveals that heart.

He does not deny sin, but He does not crush the sinner. He names hypocrisy, but He also offers healing. He exposes the beam, not to humiliate the person, but to restore sight. He wants His followers to become safe people: honest enough to see sin, humble enough to confess their own, and gentle enough to help others without wounding them.

In *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, this censorious spirit

is described as deeply unlike Christ. A person may have sharp perception and still lack the spirit of Jesus. Without forbearance and love, even correct observations can wound "precious souls, for whom Christ died."

That sentence should slow us down.

The person we criticise is someone Christ died for.

The person whose weakness frustrates us is someone Christ values.

The person whose fault seems obvious to us is still held before God with mercy, patience, and longing.

To rediscover the heart of God here is to see that God's holiness is never separated from His love. He does not invite us into careless tolerance, but neither does He invite us into cold criticism. The kingdom of heaven is not formed by people who condemn well. It is formed by people who have been judged by mercy and now extend mercy to others.

Looking Within

It is easy to read this passage and think of judgemental people we know.

That response may itself be the first beam.

Jesus invites us to pause before we apply the passage outwardly. Where have we made our opinion the standard for someone else's discipleship? Where have we assumed motives we could not possibly know? Where have we spoken about another person's weakness more easily than we prayed for their healing?

Judgement often hides in respectable forms.

It can sound like concern.

It can sound like discernment.

It can sound like doctrinal seriousness.

It can sound like leadership.

It can even sound like prayer.

But the heart knows when concern has become criticism. The heart knows when grief over sin has become satisfaction over someone else's failure. The heart knows when correction is no longer love seeking restoration, but pride seeking confirmation.

Jesus asks us to look at the beam.

The beam may be pride.

It may be resentment.

It may be insecurity.

It may be jealousy.

It may be bitterness dressed as wisdom.

It may be a need to feel spiritually superior.

It may be an old wound that makes us harsh with others.

The beam blocks vision. It does not only make us unkind. It makes us inaccurate.

We may see the fault, but not the person.

We may see the mistake, but not the struggle.

We may see the failure, but not the grace God is already working into that life.

Jesus does not ask us to become blind to others. He asks us to become clear-sighted through repentance.

Only the humbled heart can help another heart safely.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to step down from the judgement seat.

This is not a loss. It is freedom.

We were never created to carry the burden of final judgement. We cannot read the heart. We cannot weigh the whole life. We

cannot see the end from the beginning. When we try to occupy God's place, we become hard, anxious, and severe.

Jesus offers another way.

Bring the beam to Him.

Let Him search your spirit before you search your brother's fault. Let Him soften what has become hard. Let Him cleanse the secret pleasure of being right. Let Him remove the fear that makes you defensive. Let Him teach you how to speak truth without contempt.

Then, when you see clearly, you may be able to help.

Not as a judge over the fallen.

Not as a critic of the weak.

Not as a religious inspector of another person's conscience.

But as a brother or sister who also lives by mercy.

The kingdom way is not silence in the face of sin. It is truth carried by love. It is correction shaped by humility. It is discernment without contempt. It is restoration without superiority.

Jesus is inviting us to become the kind of people through whom others can encounter the Father's heart.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

You alone see every heart clearly. Forgive me for the times I have judged others harshly, assumed motives, or measured people by my own standards.

Search me first. Show me the beam in my own eye. Remove the pride, fear, resentment, and lovelessness that keep me from seeing clearly.

Give me the spirit of Jesus. Teach me to love truth without

becoming harsh. Teach me to show mercy without ignoring sin. Teach me to help others with humility, patience, and compassion.

May my words bring healing rather than harm. May my life reflect the mercy I have received from You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Journal Notes

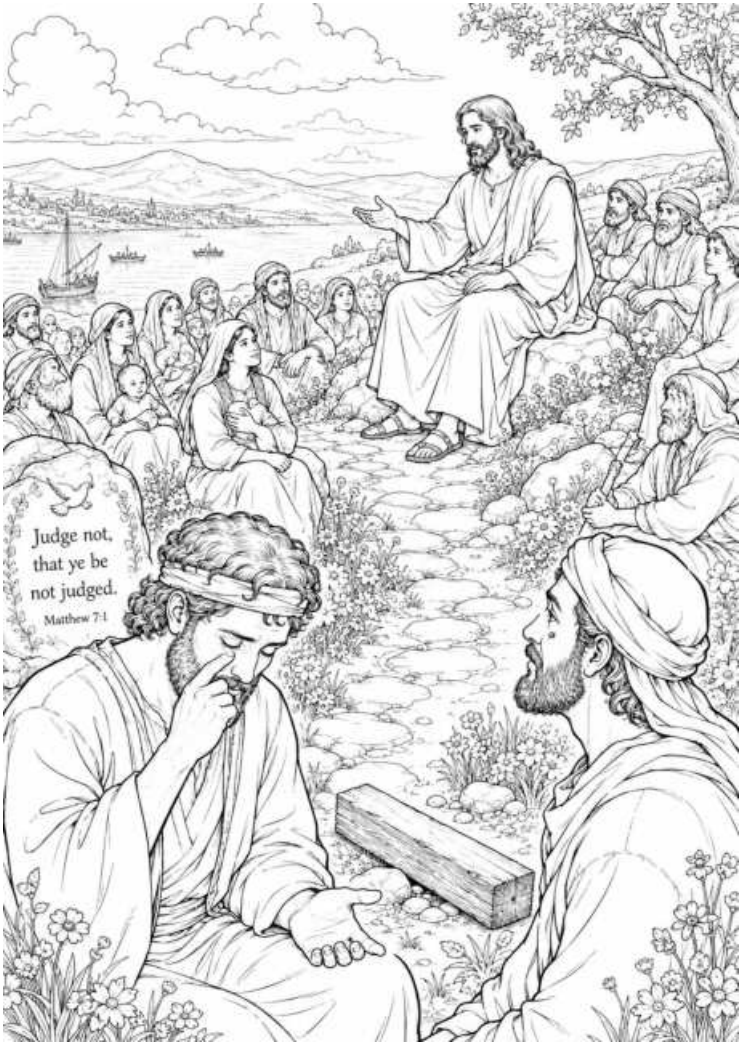
Where am I most tempted to judge others by my own expectations or preferences?

When have I assumed someone's motives without truly knowing their heart?

What "beam" might Jesus be asking me to bring before Him first?

How can I practise discernment without becoming critical or condemning?

Who needs my prayer, patience, or gentle restoration rather than my criticism?


Judge not,
that ye be
not judged.
Matthew 7:1

27

Pearls Before Swine

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Scripture
"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither
cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample
them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."
Matthew 7:6
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When Jesus Spoke

Some words of Jesus sound gentle the moment we hear them.

Others make us pause.

This is one of those sayings.

After warning His followers not to judge harshly, Jesus immediately adds a word about discernment. He does not want His disciples to become proud critics. But neither does He want them to become careless with sacred truth.

The kingdom of heaven is full of mercy, but mercy is not naivety.

Jesus had just taught His followers to remove the beam from their own eye before helping a brother with the mote in his eye. That teaching protects us from hypocrisy. Now He teaches us that not every moment is the right moment to speak, not every person is ready to receive, and not every sacred thing should be thrown into the centre of mockery and contempt.

"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs," He says.

"Neither cast ye your pearls before swine."

At first, the language may sound severe. But Jesus is not giving His followers permission to despise people. He has already taught them to love their enemies, bless those who curse them, pray for those who persecute them, and reflect the Father who sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

This is not a command to hate.

It is a call to spiritual wisdom.

Understanding the Setting

In the world of Jesus' hearers, "holy" things were not handled casually. What was sacred belonged to God and was treated with reverence. Pearls were precious, costly, and not common possessions. They were not ordinary stones to be scattered on the ground.

Dogs and swine, in this proverb, represent those who have no appreciation for what is sacred. Swine would not recognise the value of pearls. They would treat them like food, trample them when disappointed, and turn violently when angered.

Jesus uses this image to warn His disciples against placing holy truth before those who are determined only to mock, twist, or destroy it.

Ellen White explains the principle clearly: Jesus refers here to

those who have "no desire to escape from the slavery of sin" and who make the gospel "only a matter of contention and ridicule."

That distinction is important.

Jesus is not describing the confused, the wounded, the struggling, the ignorant, or the sincere seeker who asks hard questions. He is not telling us to withdraw from sinners. He Himself ate with publicans and sinners. He touched lepers. He welcomed the broken. He spoke with those whom respectable religion avoided.

The warning concerns a different spirit: the hardened spirit that has already chosen contempt.

Understanding the Teaching

This single verse stands between two major ideas.

Before it, Jesus says, "Judge not."

After it, He says, "Ask, seek, knock."

So Matthew 7:6 must be read carefully. It is not a contradiction of mercy. It is the companion of mercy. Love must be humble, but it must also be wise.

The holy things of God should not be handled as weapons for argument. Sacred truth should not be dragged into every hostile conversation. The gospel is too precious to be reduced to debate, performance, or public spectacle.

There are times when speaking is faithful.

There are also times when silence is faithful.

Jesus Himself practised both.

He spoke tenderly to the woman at the well.

He answered Nicodemus with patience.

He received sinners who came near in need.

He questioned the self-righteous when their hearts were

closed.

And at times, before hostile rulers and accusers, He remained silent.

Discernment asks: Is this person resisting because they are wounded, confused, or afraid? Or are they resisting because they are determined to mock what is holy?

Those are not the same thing.

A struggling person may still be open to grace.

A questioning person may still be seeking light.

A wounded person may speak sharply because pain has made trust difficult.

But a hardened person may only want to trample truth and injure the messenger.

Jesus does not command His followers to keep throwing pearls into that place.

This is not because the person has no value. Every person has value before God. It is because the sacred truth has value too, and there are moments when continuing to speak will not heal, but only harden.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals the wisdom of God.

God is generous, but He is not careless. He gives light, truth, mercy, and invitation. Yet He does not force the heart to receive what it has chosen to reject.

There is deep restraint in the character of God.

He calls.

He invites.

He warns.

He pleads.

But He does not turn love into coercion.

Jesus shows us that the Father honours the seriousness of human response. God does not treat sacred things as cheap. The truth about His kingdom, His grace, His holiness, and His love is not to be reduced to religious noise.

This matters especially in a world where sacred things are often pulled into argument.

A Bible verse can be used to win a fight.

A doctrine can become a weapon.

A testimony can be exposed to mockery before it has been guarded in prayer.

A sincere conversation can become entertainment for people who have no intention of listening.

Jesus teaches us that the Father's heart is both open and discerning.

He does not despise the hardened person. But He knows when a heart is not ready. He knows when the most loving thing is not another explanation, but quiet withdrawal, continued prayer, and a life that still bears witness without forcing speech into a closed place.

The heart of God is not reckless with truth.

He gives pearls because He is generous.

He tells us not to cast them away because they are holy.

Looking Within

This saying asks us to examine how we handle sacred things.

Do we speak of God with reverence, or do we use holy truth to win arguments?

Do we share Scripture from love, or from irritation?

Do we keep pressing spiritual conversations after it has

become clear that the other person is only mocking, provoking, or trying to trap us?

Do we confuse faithfulness with the need to have the last word?

There is also another question:

Have we ever been the one who trampled pearls?

Perhaps God sent truth to us through a sermon, a friend, a parent, a child, a difficult conversation, or a quiet conviction of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we dismissed it because it disturbed us. Perhaps we mocked what we did not want to obey. Perhaps we resisted not because the truth was unclear, but because it was too clear.

This passage is not only about how we speak to others.

It is also about how we receive what God gives to us.

The kingdom heart learns to treasure truth again. It does not treat Scripture as common. It does not treat prayer as empty habit. It does not treat conviction as an interruption. It does not treat the grace of God as something cheap.

A pearl must be recognised before it can be treasured.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us into wise love.

He does not call us to become suspicious, guarded, or cold. He does not ask us to decide who is worthy of salvation. That judgement belongs to God alone.

But He does ask us to walk with discernment.

There may be conversations you need to stop having in the same way.

There may be arguments you need to leave.

There may be sacred things you need to protect from careless

exposure.

There may be people you must continue loving, but from a quieter and wiser place.

This is not failure.

Sometimes obedience looks like speaking.

Sometimes obedience looks like silence.

Sometimes obedience looks like staying near.

Sometimes obedience looks like stepping back and entrusting the person to God.

Jesus Himself is the greatest Pearl, the treasure of heaven given for the life of the world. He offered Himself freely, yet He never treated His mission as something cheap. He gave His life in love, but He did not surrender the holiness of His Father's truth to the games of proud men.

To follow Him is to learn that same balance.

Tenderness without foolishness.

Courage without argument.

Discernment without contempt.

Love without self-protection becoming hardness.

The invitation is simple: treasure what is holy, and ask Jesus for wisdom in how to share it.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Teach me to treasure what is holy.

Forgive me for the times I have used sacred truth carelessly, spoken from pride, or turned Your Word into an argument instead of a witness.

Give me the wisdom of Jesus. Help me to know when to speak and when to be silent. Help me to love people without forcing

truth into hearts that are not ready to receive it.

Keep me from contempt. Keep me from fear. Keep me from the need to win.

Make my life a faithful witness to Your grace, and make my heart ready to receive every pearl of truth You place before me.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Journal Notes

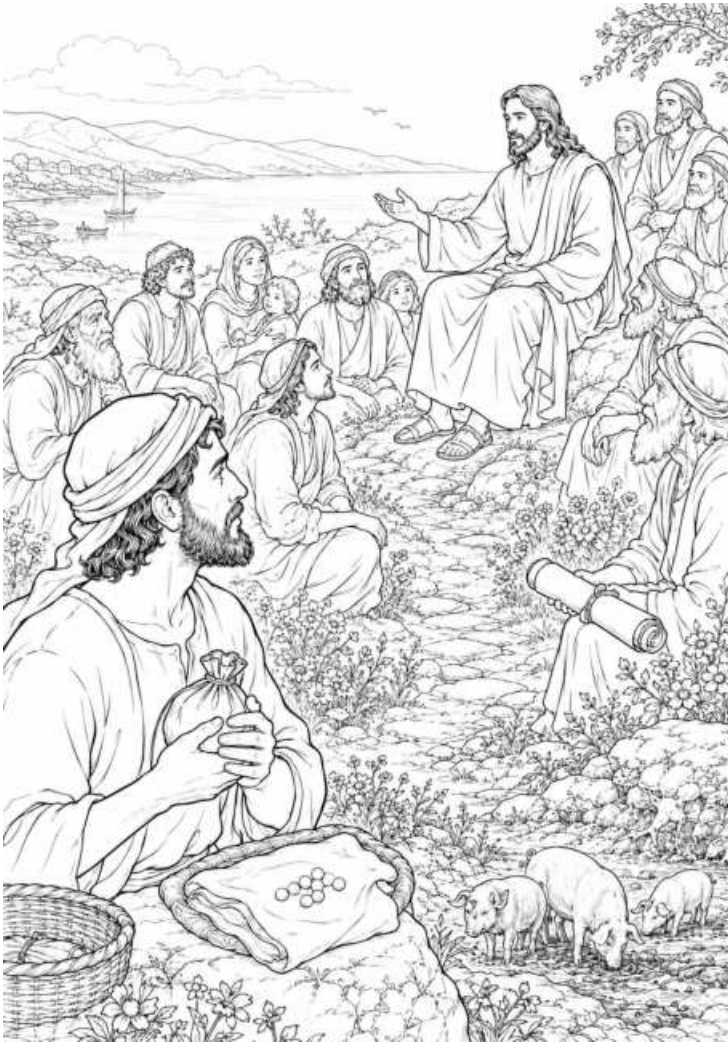
Where am I tempted to use spiritual truth to win an argument rather than serve a soul?

Are there conversations where I need more wisdom, restraint, or prayerful silence?

How can I tell the difference between a sincere question and a spirit of mockery?

Have I treated any conviction from God as common or inconvenient?

What sacred truth is Jesus asking me to treasure more carefully?



28

Ask, Seek, Knock

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Scripture
"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall
find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:
For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that
seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be
opened.
Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask
bread, will he give him a stone?
Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?
If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts
unto your children, how much more shall your Father
which is in heaven give good things to them that ask
him?"
Matthew –7:711
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When Jesus Spoke

There are moments when the soul does not know what to do next.

It has been searched by the words of Jesus. It has seen the poverty of its own spirit. It has heard the call to mercy, purity, forgiveness, secret prayer, freedom from anxiety, and humble love toward others. It has been warned against judging harshly and treating sacred things carelessly.

Then Jesus gives a promise.

"Ask."

"Seek."

"Knock."

These are not cold religious instructions. They are the language of invitation.

Jesus does not present the Father as reluctant. He does not describe God as distant, irritated, or difficult to approach. He tells His listeners that the door of heaven is not closed against the needy soul.

The poor in spirit may ask.

The mourning may seek.

The meek may knock.

The hungry and thirsty may come.

The anxious may bring their fears.

The guilty may ask for mercy.

The confused may seek wisdom.

The weary may knock at the Father's door.

This is one of the great wonders of the Sermon on the Mount: the holy God whom Jesus reveals is also the approachable Father.

Understanding the Setting

Jesus spoke these words to ordinary people gathered on a mountainside.

Many of them knew need intimately. They knew the uncer-

tainty of daily bread. They knew the burden of Roman rule, the pressure of religious expectation, and the quiet fears that settle into the lives of people who cannot control tomorrow.

But Jesus had already told them, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." He had already pointed them to the birds and the lilies. He had already taught them to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Now He returns to the Father's generosity.

He uses a simple human picture: a child asking a father for bread or fish.

The image is domestic, ordinary, and tender. A hungry child does not come with eloquent arguments. He comes because he is hungry. He asks because he needs. He trusts because he is a child.

Jesus asks His hearers to reason from the lesser to the greater. If imperfect human parents know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will the Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?

Ellen White observes that Christ gave this repeated promise so there would be "no chance for unbelief, misunderstanding, or misinterpretation." The Lord wants those who seek God to believe that He is able and willing to give.

Understanding the Teaching

The words "ask," "seek," and "knock" form a movement of desire.

To ask is to admit need.

This is where prayer begins. We stop pretending that we are self-sufficient. We come to God with open hands. We name our need before Him. We ask for mercy, wisdom, forgiveness,

strength, daily provision, and the grace to become more like Christ.

To seek is to desire God Himself.

Jesus is not merely teaching us to ask for things. He is inviting us to seek the Giver. We may begin with a need, but true prayer leads us beyond the gift to the Father's heart. We seek His counsel, His presence, His will, His righteousness, and His kingdom.

To knock is to come near and wait at the door.

Knocking suggests persistence, expectancy, and relationship. The person who knocks believes there is Someone on the other side. The child of God does not knock at an empty house. He knocks at the Father's door.

Jesus then strengthens the promise:

"Every one that asketh receiveth."

"He that seeketh findeth."

"To him that knocketh it shall be opened."

This does not mean that every request is answered in the form we imagine. A loving father does not give a child everything the child wants. Love gives what is good, not merely what is requested. The promise is deeper than getting our way. It is the assurance that the Father hears, receives, responds, and gives what is truly good.

In Luke's account, Jesus says the Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. Ellen White calls the Holy Spirit "the greatest of all gifts," because all good things are included in this gift of God's own presence and power.

This is important. The greatest answer to prayer is not only something from God.

It is God with us.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals the Father's generous heart.

Many people struggle to pray because they carry a distorted picture of God. They imagine Him as stern, disappointed, distracted, or unwilling. They think they must first become worthy before they can ask. They feel that their need disqualifies them.

Jesus teaches the opposite.

Need is not a reason to stay away. Need is the reason to come.

The Father is not honoured when we hide our weakness from Him. He is honoured when we trust His goodness enough to bring our weakness into His presence.

This does not make prayer casual or careless. We come reverently, but not fearfully. We come honestly, but not presumptuously. We come as children who know that the Father is good.

The heart of God is shown in the contrast Jesus gives.

A child asks for bread.

A cruel father might mock him with a stone.

A child asks for fish.

A wicked father might frighten him with a serpent.

But Jesus says the Father is not like that.

God does not mock hunger.

He does not despise weakness.

He does not use our asking to shame us.

He does not invite us near only to disappoint us.

Ellen White writes that we may tell the Lord, "with the simplicity of a child," exactly what we need, including temporal matters as well as spiritual blessings. The Father knows our needs and invites us to ask Him concerning them.

This is the Father Jesus came to reveal.

Not a Father who must be persuaded to care.

A Father who already knows.

A Father who already loves.

A Father who invites His children to come.

Looking Within

This passage asks us to examine how we come to God.

Do we ask freely, or do we live as though everything depends on our own strength?

Do we seek God Himself, or only the relief we want Him to provide?

Do we knock with trust, or do we give up because the door does not open according to our timetable?

Sometimes prayer becomes thin because our view of God has become small. We may believe in God's power in theory, while quietly doubting His tenderness in practice. We may ask for forgiveness but continue carrying shame. We may ask for guidance but refuse to yield our plans. We may ask for provision while remaining ruled by fear.

Jesus invites us to bring those contradictions into the light.

The child does not need perfect language to ask for bread.

The seeker does not need perfect understanding to begin seeking.

The one who knocks does not need to know how the door will open.

The invitation is not to perform prayer well.

The invitation is to come.

But there is also a surrender hidden in this promise. To come to God as Father means we come as children. We trust His

goodness, but we also yield to His wisdom. We may ask plainly, but we must not demand proudly. We may seek earnestly, but we must seek His will above our own.

Prayer is not a method for controlling God.

It is a relationship in which the heart learns to trust Him.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites you to pray again.

Not with empty repetition.

Not with religious performance.

Not as though God must be convinced to love you.

But as a child coming to the Father.

Ask Him for what you need.

Ask for the daily bread.

Ask for forgiveness.

Ask for a clean heart.

Ask for wisdom in the decision before you.

Ask for strength to obey.

Ask for healing where bitterness has made you hard.

Ask for courage where fear has made you silent.

Ask for the Holy Spirit.

Then seek Him.

Do not stop at the gift. Seek the Father's presence. Seek His kingdom. Seek His righteousness. Seek His face in Scripture, prayer, obedience, and quiet trust.

Then knock.

When the answer is not immediate, remain at the door of mercy. Do not confuse delay with rejection. Do not confuse silence with absence. The Father has not forgotten His child.

Jesus places this promise in the mouth of God's own Son. That

means we do not come to prayer leaning on our feelings, our worthiness, or our spiritual performance. We come leaning on Christ.

The door is open because Jesus has brought us to the Father.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for inviting me to ask, seek, and knock.

Forgive me for the times I have lived as though I must carry life alone. Forgive me for doubting Your goodness, hiding my need, or coming to You only after I have exhausted my own strength.

Teach me to pray with the simplicity of a child. Help me to ask honestly, seek earnestly, and knock with patient trust.

Give me what is truly good. Give me daily bread, wisdom, forgiveness, courage, and a heart that desires Your will. Above all, give me Your Spirit, so that my life may be shaped by the presence of Christ.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Journal Notes

What need have I been carrying without honestly bringing it to God?

Do I find it easier to ask God for things than to seek God Himself?

Where do I need to keep knocking with patient trust?

How does Jesus' picture of the Father challenge my view of God?

What "good thing" might the Father be forming in me, even if the answer looks different from what I expected?



29

The Golden Rule

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Scripture
"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men
should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is
the law and the prophets."
Matthew 7:12
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When Jesus Spoke

Some teachings of Jesus gather many commandments into one sentence.

This is one of them.

After speaking about judgement, discernment, prayer, and the Father's goodness, Jesus turns His hearers toward the daily life of the kingdom. He does not leave love as a vague feeling. He gives it a form simple enough for a child to understand and searching enough to expose the deepest selfishness of the human heart.

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

This is not merely a rule about politeness.

It is the law of love made practical.

Jesus asks His followers to pause before they speak, act, decide, accuse, serve, correct, ignore, or respond. He asks them to step out of the centre of their own concerns and enter, as far as possible, into the place of another person.

How would I wish to be treated if I were in their position?

How would I want someone to speak to me if I were weak, afraid, confused, ashamed, overlooked, or in need?

How would I hope to be remembered if I had failed?

How would I want to be helped if I had no power to repay?

The Golden Rule is simple, but it is not easy. It stands against pride, selfishness, indifference, and the habit of seeing other people only through the lens of our own needs.

Understanding the Setting

Jesus spoke these words to people who lived under social, religious, and political pressure.

Some were poor. Some were sick. Some were burdened by taxes. Some were looked down upon by religious leaders. Some had learned to measure people by status, purity, usefulness, or reputation. In that world, as in ours, people naturally asked, "What am I owed?" "What do I deserve?" "How should others treat me?"

Jesus reverses the question.

He does not begin with what we should receive. He begins with what we should give.

Ellen White observes that the Jews were concerned with what

they should receive, especially honour, power, respect, and service. But Christ taught that the true burden of the heart should not be "How much are we to receive?" but "How much can we give?"

This moves the command from manners to discipleship.

The Golden Rule does not ask us merely to avoid harming others. It calls us to active goodness. It does not say, "Do not do to others what you dislike." It says, "Do ye even so to them."

That means love must move.

It must notice.

It must imagine.

It must serve.

It must act.

Jesus then adds, "for this is the law and the prophets." In other words, this one sentence gathers up the moral direction of Scripture. It does not replace God's commands. It expresses their relational heart.

Understanding the Teaching

The Golden Rule begins with holy imagination.

Jesus asks us to place ourselves in another person's position. Not to excuse sin. Not to erase truth. Not to pretend every situation is simple. But to recognise that the person before us is not an object, obstacle, tool, or irritation. They are a human being made in the image of God.

Ellen White describes the rule this way: "In your association with others, put yourself in their place." We are to enter into their feelings, difficulties, disappointments, joys, and sorrows, and then treat them as we would wish to be treated if our positions were exchanged.

This teaching reaches every relationship.

In the home, it asks: Am I speaking as I would wish to be spoken to?

In the church, it asks: Am I treating the weak, the poor, the new believer, the difficult person, and the unnoticed person as I would hope to be treated?

In conflict, it asks: Am I being fair, patient, and honest, or am I demanding grace for myself while giving severity to others?

In leadership, it asks: Am I using authority to serve, or to secure my own comfort?

In daily life, it asks: Am I alert to the needs of others, or only to my own inconvenience?

Jesus is not giving us a sentimental slogan. He is giving us a test of kingdom character.

The Golden Rule exposes selective love. It confronts the instinct to be generous with people who benefit us and careless with those who cannot. It challenges the human habit of wanting mercy when we fail, but strictness when others fail.

It also guards against passive religion. A person may avoid obvious harm and still live selfishly. The Golden Rule calls for positive love. It asks us to do the good we would desire if we were lonely, hungry, misunderstood, burdened, grieving, or afraid.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals the generous fairness of God.

God does not treat people as disposable. He does not look at the poor, the suffering, the sinful, or the weak as interruptions to His kingdom. He sees them as souls of infinite value.

The Golden Rule flows from the Father's own heart. He is the One who gives before we can repay. He is the One who sends rain

on the just and the unjust. He is the One who hears the needy, forgives the repentant, receives the returning child, and gives good gifts to those who ask Him.

Jesus is the perfect living picture of this rule.

He entered our place.

He did not love humanity from a distance. He came near. He took our nature. He bore our griefs. He carried our sorrows. He knew hunger, weariness, rejection, misunderstanding, and pain. He treated others not according to what they could give Him, but according to the love of the Father.

When people were ashamed, He restored dignity.

When people were sick, He touched them.

When sinners came near, He received them.

When His enemies crucified Him, He prayed for them.

The Golden Rule is not merely something Jesus taught. It is something Jesus lived.

Ellen White writes that its "truest illustration is seen in the life and character of Jesus," where softness, beauty, and sweetness flowed from His presence.

To rediscover the heart of God here is to see that divine love is not abstract. It becomes visible in how people are treated. A religion that does not make us more tender, more just, more merciful, and more attentive to human need has missed the spirit of Christ.

Looking Within

This verse is easy to admire and difficult to obey.

It asks us to examine the everyday ways we protect ourselves from costly love.

Do I want patience from others while offering impatience in

return?

Do I want understanding when I am under pressure, while judging others quickly when they are under pressure?

Do I want people to assume the best about me, while I assume the worst about them?

Do I want generosity when I am in need, while remaining indifferent to the needs near me?

Do I want forgiveness when I fail, while keeping careful records of another person's failure?

The Golden Rule does not allow us to hide behind religious language. It brings discipleship into the ordinary places where character is revealed: the tone of a message, the way we speak about absent people, the way we treat workers, children, elderly people, strangers, family members, and those who cannot advance our interests.

It also asks us to look at our resources.

If we have knowledge, comfort, influence, stability, or opportunity, these are not merely possessions. They are stewardships. Ellen White states that whatever we possess above others places us "in debt" to those who are less favoured, especially the suffering, the widow, and the fatherless.

That is a searching thought.

The question is not only, "What do I have?"

It is, "Whom has God called me to serve with what I have?"

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to practise love with moral imagination.

Before you answer, pause.

Before you judge, pause.

Before you dismiss someone's need, pause.

Before you speak sharply, pause.

Before you protect your own comfort, pause.

Then ask: If I were in their place, how would I hope to be treated?

This does not mean every request must be granted. It does not mean boundaries disappear. It does not mean truth is softened into dishonesty. Jesus Himself was truthful, wise, and discerning. But it does mean that even our boundaries, corrections, and difficult decisions must be shaped by love.

The Golden Rule is not weakness. It is strength surrendered to Christ.

It is the way of people who no longer need to make themselves the centre. It is the way of those who have received mercy and now extend mercy. It is the way of those who have been loved by the Father and now carry His love into human relationships.

Jesus is inviting us to become the kind of people through whom others experience something of God's fairness, tenderness, and care.

Not only in great acts of service.

In ordinary faithfulness.

In honest dealings.

In gentle speech.

In practical kindness.

In mercy toward weakness.

In attention to the overlooked.

In love that asks not only, "What am I owed?" but "What can I give?"

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for treating me with mercy, patience, and generous love.

Forgive me for the times I have wanted kindness from others while withholding it from them. Forgive me for selfishness, indifference, harshness, and the ways I have failed to see people as You see them.

Teach me the way of Jesus. Help me to enter more thoughtfully into the needs, burdens, fears, and hopes of others. Give me a heart that does not merely avoid harm, but actively seeks to do good.

Make my words, choices, and relationships a reflection of Your love.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Journal Notes

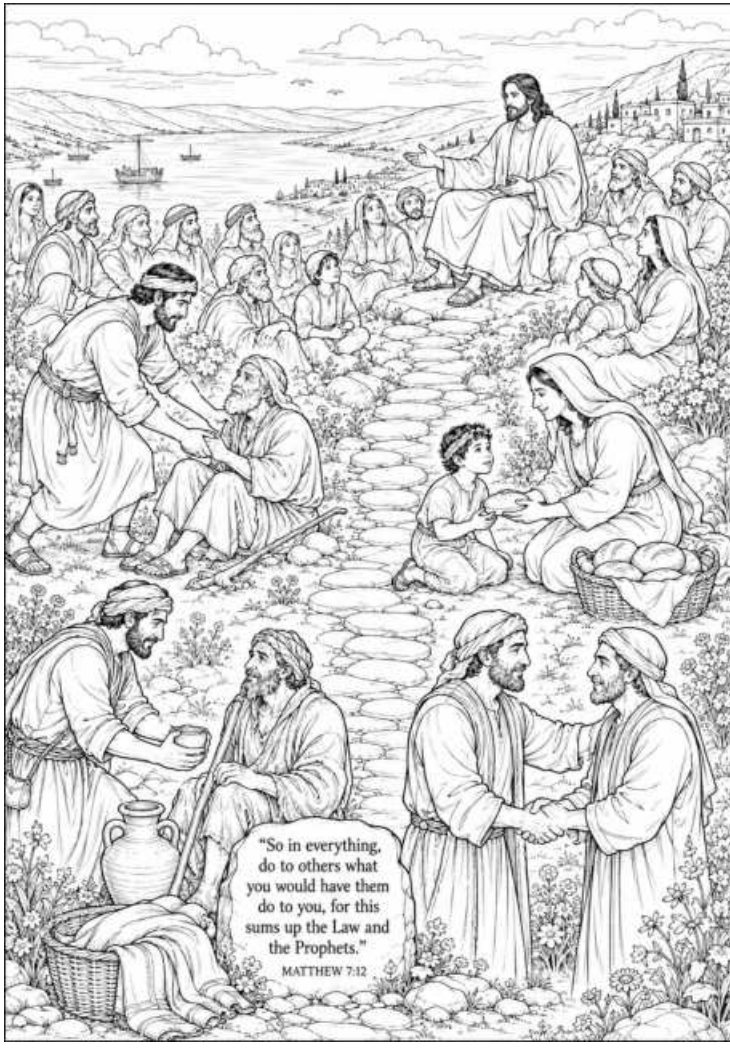
Where do I most need to practise the Golden Rule in my daily relationships?

Who in my life needs the patience, kindness, or mercy I would want if I were in their place?

Am I more concerned with what I should receive or with what I can give?

How can I treat the poor, suffering, lonely, or overlooked in a way that reflects the heart of Jesus?

What practical act of love is Jesus inviting me to do today?


"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."
MATTHEW 7:12

VI

Two Destinies

Jesus ends His sermon with decision. There are two gates, two roads, two kinds of fruit, two claims of discipleship, and two foundations. The question is not whether we admired His words, but whether we heard them and built our lives upon them.

30

The Narrow Gate

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Scripture
"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the
gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to
destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:
Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way,
which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find
it."
Matthew –7:1314, KJV
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When Jesus Spoke

Jesus had spoken of the Father who sees in secret.

He had taught His people to pray.

He had called them away from anxiety, judgement, hypocrisy, empty religion, and self-centred living.

He had shown them the heart of God.

Now, as the sermon moves toward its close, His words become

sharper.

There are two gates.

There are two ways.

There are two destinies.

This is not because God is reluctant to save. It is not because His mercy is narrow. It is not because His love is limited. Throughout the sermon, Jesus has revealed the Father as generous, patient, merciful, attentive, forgiving, and near. The same Father who feeds the birds, clothes the lilies, hears the prayer of His children, and gives good gifts to those who ask now calls His people to choose the way that leads to life.

The narrow gate is not an image of a harsh God trying to keep people out.

It is the voice of a loving Saviour calling people in before they drift too far down the wrong road.

There is a kind of life that looks easy because it asks little of the heart. It allows pride to remain untouched. It permits bitterness to survive. It makes room for secret sin, public religion, anxious striving, careless speech, divided loyalty, and love without sacrifice.

That road is broad.

Many walk there.

But Jesus does not flatter the crowd. He does not tell His hearers that every path leads home. He speaks with the honesty of divine love.

"Enter ye in."

Understanding the Setting

In the world of Jesus, many towns were surrounded by walls. Their gates were not merely decorative entrances. They marked safety, belonging, and protection. At evening, the gates would be closed. Travellers approaching a town after a long day's journey had to make their way up steep, difficult paths before night fell.

Ellen White draws on this setting when she describes the narrow, upward road leading to the city gate as an image of the Christian way. The traveller could not loiter endlessly on the road and still expect to enter at leisure. The way home required movement, intention, and urgency.

This image would have been clear to Christ's hearers. They knew what it meant to walk dusty roads. They knew what it meant to climb a difficult path. They knew what it meant to reach a city gate before it closed.

Jesus used something familiar to reveal something eternal.

The broad way did not need much effort to find. It was spacious, popular, and easy to enter. It made room for many opinions, many excuses, many compromises, and many forms of self-rule. But its destination was destruction.

The narrow way was different. It led upward. It required surrender. It could not be travelled while carrying everything the natural heart wanted to keep.

This is why the narrow gate follows the Golden Rule so naturally. Jesus has just said, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." The life of the kingdom is not vague admiration for goodness. It is love made practical. It is mercy embodied. It is the surrender of self-centredness.

The gate is narrow because love is narrow.

Not narrow in mercy.

Narrow in direction.

Love cannot walk every road. It cannot cherish pride and practise humility at the same time. It cannot serve God and mammon. It cannot forgive and keep revenge as a hidden treasure. It cannot pray, "Thy will be done," while quietly insisting, "My will must rule."

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus does not present three roads.

There is not a holy road, a wicked road, and a comfortable middle road. There are only two ways.

One leads to life.

One leads to destruction.

This may feel severe to modern readers. We often prefer language that leaves every option open. We like to think of spiritual life as a broad landscape where sincerity alone is enough, where all desires can be baptised, and where every choice eventually finds its way to God.

But Jesus loves us too much to speak that way.

He knows that roads have destinations.

A person may choose a path casually, but the path does not end casually. Small choices become habits. Habits become character. Character shapes destiny. The broad way is not always marked by open rebellion. Often it looks ordinary. It is the way of least resistance. It is the life shaped by appetite, approval, resentment, fear, ambition, and self-protection.

It is possible to walk the broad road while still using religious language.

It is possible to admire Jesus without following Him.

It is possible to hear the Sermon on the Mount and still refuse the kingdom it reveals.

The narrow gate is the entrance into the life Jesus has described from the beginning of the sermon. It is the way of the poor in spirit, who know they cannot save themselves. It is the way of those who mourn over sin. It is the way of the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The narrow way is not entered by pride.

It is not entered by performance.

It is not entered by religious reputation.

It is entered by surrender to Christ.

This is where we must be careful. The narrow gate is not salvation by effort. Jesus is not saying, "Work hard enough and you may earn life." The whole sermon has already ruled that out. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was not enough. Public religion was not enough. Human approval was not enough. Anxiety could not secure the soul. Judging others could not cleanse the heart.

The narrow gate is narrow because only one kind of person can pass through it: the person willing to come to God without self-rule.

We do not enter carrying our pride.

We do not enter carrying our cherished sin.

We do not enter carrying our right to hate.

We do not enter carrying our secret idols.

We enter by coming to Jesus.

This is why the command is both urgent and hopeful. "Enter ye in." Jesus does not merely warn us about destruction. He opens the way to life.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals a God who tells the truth.

That may not sound comforting at first, but it is one of the deepest expressions of divine love. A false comfort would leave us undisturbed on the wrong road. A sentimental gospel would reassure us while our hearts remain far from God. But Jesus does not confuse kindness with silence.

He warns because He loves.

He calls because He desires to save.

He narrows the way because He is leading us to life.

There is mercy in the narrowness. A doctor who tells the truth about a serious illness is not being cruel. A parent who pulls a child away from danger is not being unkind. A shepherd who blocks the path toward a cliff is not limiting the sheep's joy. Love often becomes most protective when the danger is most real.

The Father revealed by Jesus is not indifferent to where our choices lead. He does not stand at a distance while humanity wanders toward ruin. He comes near. He speaks plainly. He places life before us.

The narrow gate also reveals the holiness of God.

God's kingdom cannot be shaped around sin. Heaven is not merely a place we enter one day. It is the reign of God beginning in the heart now. To enter the narrow way is to allow God to restore His image in us. It is to be changed in the hidden places. It is to become truthful, merciful, pure, forgiving, and faithful through the life of Christ within us.

God does not save us by leaving us as we are.

He saves us by bringing us home to Himself.

The broad way destroys because it separates the soul from the Source of life. The narrow way leads to life because it brings the

soul into communion with God.

This is not restriction for restriction's sake.

This is restoration.

Looking Within

The broad way is easy to recognise in theory and difficult to admit in ourselves.

Most of us do not think of ourselves as people walking toward destruction. We think of ourselves as busy, tired, imperfect, sincere, misunderstood, or trying our best. Some of that may be true. But Jesus does not ask us to compare ourselves with the worst examples we can imagine. He asks us to look honestly at the direction of our lives.

What path am I actually walking?

Not what path do I admire?

Not what path do I discuss?

Not what path do I recommend to others?

What path am I walking?

The broad way often begins with small permissions.

I will keep this resentment.

I will delay obedience.

I will protect this habit.

I will serve God, but not in that area.

I will forgive, but not fully.

I will seek the kingdom, but only after I secure everything else.

I will follow Jesus, but I will also keep control.

The narrow gate confronts these divided places. It does not ask whether we have religious knowledge. It asks whether we are willing to be ruled by Christ.

For some, the narrow gate may mean confessing sin that has

been hidden for years.

For others, it may mean releasing bitterness that has become part of their identity.

For others, it may mean choosing integrity when dishonesty would be easier.

For others, it may mean leaving behind the need to be admired.

For others, it may mean trusting God in a season where obedience feels costly.

The narrow way is not always dramatic. Often it is walked in ordinary moments: the honest answer, the quiet apology, the unseen act of mercy, the refusal to retaliate, the prayer whispered when anxiety rises, the choice to seek God first when everything else demands first place.

The broad way is crowded because self-rule is natural.

The narrow way is found because grace awakens the heart.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus does not say, "Admire the narrow gate."

He says, "Enter."

This is a personal invitation.

There comes a point where we must stop standing outside the teaching of Jesus as observers. We must stop treating His words as beautiful ideals that belong safely on a page. The Sermon on the Mount is not merely meant to be read. It is meant to be entered.

Enter the mercy He has shown you.

Enter the forgiveness He offers.

Enter the purity He creates.

Enter the trust He teaches.

Enter the kingdom where the Father is known, loved, and

obeyed.

The narrow gate may feel too small for the life we have built around ourselves. That is because it is too small for the old life. But it is not too small for the person who comes to Christ empty-handed.

The gate is narrow, but it is open.

The way is difficult, but it leads to life.

The crowd may choose another road, but Jesus still calls.

Today, the invitation is not to solve your whole life at once. It is to take the next faithful step toward Christ. Lay down what cannot pass through the gate. Release what is leading you away from life. Trust the One who has never spoken a careless word and never given a loveless command.

The narrow way is the way of Jesus Himself.

And where He leads, there is life.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for loving us enough to tell us the truth. Thank You for not leaving us to wander down roads that cannot lead to life.

Search our hearts. Show us where we have chosen the broad way of pride, comfort, resentment, compromise, or self-rule. Give us the courage to surrender what cannot enter Your kingdom.

Lord Jesus, lead us through the narrow gate. Teach us to walk Your way with humility, faith, patience, and love. Help us not merely to admire Your words, but to obey them.

Make our lives a faithful response to Your invitation.

Amen.

Journal Notes

Where do I sense Jesus calling me to make a clear choice rather than remain undecided?

What parts of my life feel too crowded with pride, fear, resentment, or self-will to pass through the narrow gate?

How does this passage reveal God's love rather than merely His warning?

What is one practical step of obedience I can take today on the narrow way?

Where have I confused the popular way with the faithful way?

What would it look like for me to follow Jesus more honestly this week?



31

False Prophets

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Scripture
"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in
sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening
wolves.
Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather
grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?
Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit;
but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.
A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither
can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.
Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn
down, and cast into the fire.
Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."
Matthew –7:1520, KJV
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When Jesus Spoke

Jesus had just spoken of the narrow gate.

He had called His hearers away from the broad road and

toward the way that leads to life. Now He gives a warning that belongs beside that invitation.

"Beware of false prophets."

The danger is not only that a person may choose the broad road openly. There is another danger. Someone may point to the broad road and call it the way of God.

Jesus does not warn His disciples against obvious enemies only. He warns them against religious deception. False prophets do not always appear hostile. They may speak warmly. They may use sacred language. They may seem gentle, persuasive, and sincere. They may look like sheep.

But Jesus sees beneath appearances.

He speaks of wolves.

This is a severe image. A wolf among sheep does not merely misunderstand the flock. It feeds on the flock. It uses nearness as an opportunity for harm. It hides danger beneath familiarity.

Yet Jesus does not leave His people helpless. He gives them a test.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits."

Not by charm.

Not by confidence.

Not by religious vocabulary.

Not by outward success.

By fruit.

Understanding the Setting

In the biblical world, prophets claimed to speak on behalf of God. A true prophet did not merely offer religious opinion. He called people back to the covenant, back to faithfulness, back to repentance, back to the living God.

But Israel also knew the danger of false prophets. Some promised peace when there was no peace. Some softened the call of God to make it more acceptable. Some spoke from ambition, fear, pride, or self-interest. Some made rebellion sound spiritual.

Jesus brings that warning into the Sermon on the Mount.

This matters because the sermon has been a direct unveiling of kingdom life. Jesus has exposed false righteousness, false prayer, false fasting, false judgement, false treasure, and false security. Now He exposes false teaching.

The warning appears immediately after the narrow gate because false teaching often attacks the narrow way. Ellen White writes that teachers of falsehood arise to draw people away from the narrow path and the strait gate, even while appearing in sheep's clothing.

This warning is therefore not an interruption in the sermon. It is part of its final appeal.

Jesus is saying: once you have seen the way of life, be careful who you allow to guide your steps.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus gives two images.

First, He speaks of wolves in sheep's clothing.

This image teaches discernment. Appearances can mislead. A person may speak in a religious tone and still lead others away from God. A message may sound comforting and still weaken obedience. A teacher may appear compassionate while quietly removing the call to repentance, surrender, holiness, and truth.

Second, Jesus speaks of trees and fruit.

This image teaches patient examination. Fruit is not the same

as leaves. Leaves may appear quickly. Fruit takes time. Leaves can suggest life, but fruit reveals nature.

The fruit of a teacher includes the character of the message, the spirit of the life, and the direction in which people are being led.

Does the teaching lead people to know God more truly?

Does it deepen reverence for Scripture?

Does it produce humility, repentance, mercy, purity, faithfulness, and love?

Does it lead people to obey Jesus?

Or does it produce pride, confusion, compromise, spiritual carelessness, self-exaltation, fear, division, and indifference toward God's commands?

Jesus does not say, "You will know them by their claims."

He says, "You will know them by their fruits."

This is important because false teaching is rarely false in every sentence. It may contain truth, warmth, insight, and emotional appeal. But its fruit reveals its root. If it separates people from the words of Christ, it cannot be trusted. If it makes sin seem safe, it cannot be trusted. If it replaces surrender with self-confidence, it cannot be trusted. If it encourages people to admire Jesus while refusing His lordship, it cannot be trusted.

Ellen White makes the test plain: false teachers are not to be judged by fair speeches or exalted professions, but by the Word of God. The question is whether their message leads people to reverence God and show love for Him through loyalty to His commandments.

This is not a call to suspicion.

It is a call to spiritual sobriety.

Jesus has already warned against harsh judgement. He has told us to remove the beam from our own eye before trying to

remove the mote from another's eye. So this passage cannot mean that Christians should become proud fault-finders. The same Jesus who said, "Judge not," now says, "Beware."

Both are necessary.

We must not condemn with a proud heart.

We must not follow with a blind one.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals God as a faithful Shepherd.

He does not leave His sheep defenceless. He knows that not every voice speaking in His name represents His heart. He knows that His people can be confused, impressed, manipulated, and led astray. So He warns them before the danger overtakes them.

There is mercy in the word "beware."

A careless god would allow people to be deceived without warning. A harsh god would mock them after they fell. But the Father revealed by Jesus speaks ahead of danger. He places light on the path. He teaches His children how to discern the difference between appearance and reality.

God's love is not gullible.

God's truth is not fragile.

God's mercy does not require us to call every voice safe.

Jesus also reveals that God cares about the fruit of the life. The kingdom is not built on image, performance, or religious theatre. It is built on truth working inwardly until it becomes visible outwardly.

Good fruit is not manufactured by human effort alone. It grows from a life rooted in God. A heart surrendered to Christ begins to bear the character of Christ. Mercy becomes visible. Truth becomes steady. Humility becomes real. Love becomes

practical. Obedience becomes joyful. The life begins to show the root.

This is why false prophecy is so dangerous. It does not merely give wrong information. It distorts the picture of God. It can make God seem careless about sin, uninterested in holiness, indulgent toward pride, or useful for selfish ambition.

Jesus protects us from that distortion.

He calls us back to fruit.

He calls us back to Scripture.

He calls us back to the Father's heart.

Looking Within

This passage is easy to apply to other people.

It is harder to let it search us.

We may think first of public teachers, pastors, authors, influencers, or religious leaders. That application is valid. We should be careful about the voices we trust. We should not surrender our conscience to popularity, charisma, or confidence.

But there is also a more personal question.

What kind of fruit is my life producing?

Jesus does not only expose false prophets out there. He teaches us that inward reality eventually becomes visible. A tree cannot escape its fruit forever.

If my inner life is rooted in resentment, I should not be surprised when sharpness grows from me.

If my heart is ruled by pride, I should not be surprised when defensiveness appears.

If I feed on fear, I should not be surprised when suspicion spreads.

If I keep secret compromise, I should not be surprised when

spiritual dullness follows.

But if my life is rooted in Christ, the fruit of Christ will begin to appear. It may grow slowly. It may grow through pruning. It may grow through repentance and repeated surrender. But it will grow.

The question is not whether I can perform goodness for a season.

The question is what my life is growing from.

This passage also asks us to examine the voices we allow to shape us.

Not every persuasive voice is wise.

Not every comforting message is true.

Not every spiritual-sounding idea leads to Christ.

Not every religious teacher deepens love for God.

A simple test may help:

After listening, reading, or following, am I being drawn closer to Jesus, Scripture, repentance, holiness, mercy, and love?

Or am I being drawn toward self-importance, spiritual laziness, contempt for others, rebellion against God's Word, or comfort without surrender?

Fruit tells the truth.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to become discerning disciples.

He does not ask us to live in fear. He does not ask us to distrust everyone. He does not ask us to become harsh critics of every weakness we see in others.

He asks us to stay awake.

He asks us to test fruit.

He asks us to remain close enough to His voice that we can

recognise what does not sound like Him.

The safest place for the believer is not intellectual arrogance. It is not emotional suspicion. It is not constant religious debate.

The safest place is nearness to Christ.

When we know His words, falsehood loses some of its power.

When we know His character, distortions become easier to recognise.

When we know His Spirit, the spirit of the wolf becomes harder to mistake for the spirit of the Shepherd.

Today, Jesus invites us to examine both the teachers we follow and the fruit we bear.

Bring your influences to Him.

Bring your beliefs to Him.

Bring your habits, attitudes, loyalties, and private thoughts to Him.

Ask Him to make the tree good.

Ask Him to root your life in His grace.

Ask Him to make your fruit truthful, humble, merciful, pure, and faithful.

The Shepherd who warns us about wolves is the same Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.

His warning is love.

His truth is protection.

His way leads to life.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for warning us with love. Thank You for not leaving us vulnerable to voices that may lead us away from Christ.

Give us discernment without pride. Give us courage without

harshness. Give us love for truth without a spirit of condemnation.

Teach us to test every message by Your Word. Help us recognise the fruit of what we hear, what we follow, and what we allow to shape our hearts.

Lord Jesus, make our own lives good trees rooted in You. Let our words, choices, relationships, and hidden thoughts bear the fruit of Your Spirit.

Keep us close to Your voice.

Amen.

Journal Notes

What voices currently shape my understanding of God, Scripture, and discipleship?

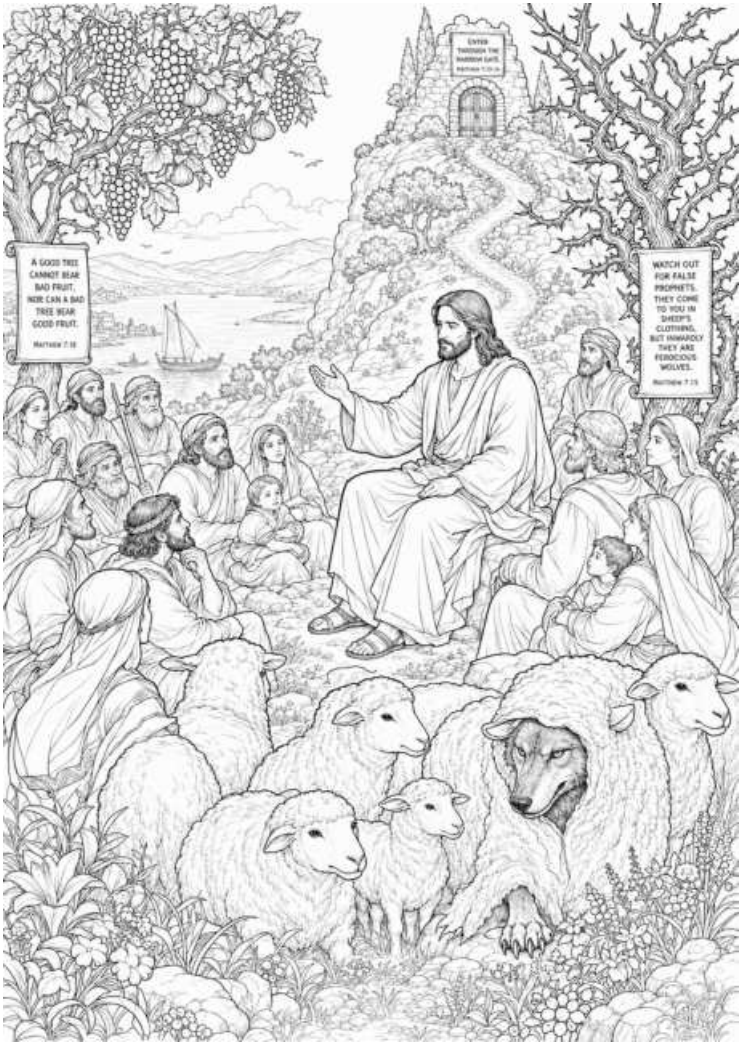
Do those voices lead me closer to Jesus, obedience, humility, mercy, and truth?

Where have I been impressed by appearance rather than fruit?

What kind of fruit is most visible in my own life right now?

Where do I need to ask Jesus to change the root, not merely the outward behaviour?

How can I practise discernment without becoming proud, suspicious, or unloving?


A GOOD TREE CANNOT BEAR BAD FRUIT, NOR CAN A BAD TREE BEAR GOOD FRUIT.
Matthew 7:18
WATCH OUT FOR FALSE PROPHETS. THEY COME TO YOU IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING, BUT INWARDLY THEY ARE FEROCIOUS WOLVES.

32

Lord, Lord

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Scripture
"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall
enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth
the will of my Father which is in heaven.
Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we
not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast
out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?
And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you:
depart from me, ye that work iniquity."
Matthew –7:2123, KJV
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When Jesus Spoke

There are few words in the Sermon on the Mount more searching than these.

Jesus does not speak here to the openly careless only. He does not speak only to people who have no interest in God. He speaks of people who use His name.

They say, "Lord, Lord."

They speak with religious confidence.

They point to visible works.

They expect acceptance.

Yet Jesus says that not everyone who calls Him Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. The issue is not whether the lips can form the right words. The issue is whether the life has been brought into surrender to the Father.

This is a deeply sobering passage. But it is not meant to create despair in sincere hearts. Jesus is not trying to frighten the weak believer who comes to Him honestly, aware of failure, longing for grace. Throughout the sermon, He has welcomed the poor in spirit, comforted those who mourn, blessed those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and invited His hearers to ask, seek, and knock.

This warning is aimed at something different.

It is aimed at religious confidence without relational surrender.

It is aimed at outward profession without inward obedience.

It is aimed at the terrible possibility of doing impressive things in the name of Jesus while never truly knowing Jesus Himself.

Understanding the Setting

This warning follows naturally from the previous one.

Jesus has just warned His people about false prophets. He said they would come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they would be ravening wolves. He then gave the test: "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Now He presses the matter even deeper.

It is possible to have religious language and still lack the life of the kingdom.

It is possible to do visible works and still be unknown by Christ.

In the religious world of Jesus' day, public acts carried weight. Teaching, prophecy, exorcism, and mighty works could impress the crowd. People often measured spiritual authority by visible power, reputation, and outward success.

Jesus cuts through that assumption.

He does not deny that impressive works may be done. He does not make visibility the test of faithfulness. He brings everything back to the will of the Father.

Ellen White makes the warning plain: not all who profess Christ's name and wear His badge are truly His. Many who have taught in His name will be found wanting at last.

This is not a small warning at the edge of the sermon.

It belongs at the centre of Christ's closing appeal.

The Sermon on the Mount has never been about religious appearance. From the beginning, Jesus has been calling for a heart made new by God.

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus gives two measures of false security.

The first is correct language.

"Lord, Lord."

The repetition suggests urgency, intensity, and confidence. These are not people who refuse religious speech. They recognise the title. They speak to Jesus directly. They know what to say.

But Jesus says that words alone do not prove discipleship.

A person may confess Christ outwardly and still resist His authority inwardly. A person may speak of the Lord while refusing the Father's will. A person may be orthodox in vocabulary but

unchanged in heart.

The second false security is religious activity.

"Have we not prophesied in thy name?"

"Have we not cast out devils?"

"Have we not done many wonderful works?"

These are not small claims. They are significant, public, and impressive. Yet Jesus does not make them the final test. The final test is relationship expressed through obedience.

"But he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

This does not mean that obedience earns salvation. Jesus is not replacing grace with performance. He is exposing the difference between living faith and empty profession.

True faith receives Christ.

Receiving Christ changes the heart.

A changed heart begins to obey.

Obedience is not the price we pay so that God will love us. It is the evidence that His love is becoming real in us.

Ellen White describes mere profession as having no value when it does not lead to obedience. She writes that the faith in Christ which saves the soul is not a belief that sets aside God's commandments, but one that bears fruit in a changed life.

This helps us understand the severity of Jesus' words.

"I never knew you."

He does not say, "I once knew you, but then forgot you."

He says, "I never knew you."

The tragedy is not merely that these people failed to work hard enough. The tragedy is that they mistook religious activity for communion with Christ. They had His name on their lips, but not His life in their hearts.

The word "know" in Scripture often carries the idea of relational knowledge, covenant nearness, and personal communion.

Jesus is speaking of more than information. He is speaking of belonging.

To know Christ is not merely to know about Him.

It is to come to Him, trust Him, surrender to Him, abide in Him, and allow His life to bear fruit in us.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals the honesty of God.

God is not deceived by religious performance. He sees beyond words, platforms, titles, claims, and reputations. He knows whether the heart has yielded to Him.

At first, this may unsettle us. But it should also comfort us.

If God sees through false profession, He also sees sincere weakness. He knows the difference between a hypocrite using His name and a struggling child reaching for His hand. He knows the difference between rebellion hidden under religion and repentance hidden under tears.

Jesus does not reject the poor in spirit.

He rejects iniquity disguised as discipleship.

This passage also reveals that God desires relationship, not religious theatre.

The words "I never knew you" show us what Christ values. He is not looking first for impressive achievements. He is looking for surrendered hearts. He desires communion. He desires trust. He desires love that responds to the Father's will.

The heart of God is not satisfied with outward nearness while the inner life remains far away.

He does not want to be used as a name attached to human ambition.

He does not want worship that leaves the will untouched.

He does not want activity without abiding.

He wants us.

This is why the warning is severe. False religion is dangerous because it allows a person to feel safe while remaining separated from Christ. It gives the language of belonging without the life of belonging. It creates confidence without conversion.

But Jesus speaks now so that we do not have to hear those words then.

His warning is mercy before judgement.

His exposure is grace before it is too late.

Looking Within

This passage asks us to examine the ground of our confidence.

What am I relying on before God?

My religious words?

My service?

My knowledge?

My ministry?

My visible usefulness?

My reputation among other believers?

My past experiences?

My family background?

My ability to speak about spiritual things?

None of these can replace knowing Christ.

The danger is subtle because religious activity can feel like relationship with God. We can be busy for Jesus while becoming distant from Jesus. We can defend truth while losing tenderness. We can speak of faith while avoiding surrender. We can work in public while neglecting the secret place.

Jesus brings us back to the central question:

Do I know Him?

Not simply: Do I speak His name?

Not simply: Do I do Christian things?

Not simply: Do others think I am spiritual?

Do I know Him?

And does my life show the Father's will becoming precious to me?

This does not mean the sincere believer will never fail. The Sermon on the Mount has already shown us our need. We are people who must ask for daily bread, daily forgiveness, and daily deliverance from evil. The issue is not flawless performance. The issue is the direction of the heart.

A surrendered person may stumble, but they return to Christ.

A proud person may perform, but they resist being ruled by Christ.

A surrendered person grieves over sin.

A proud person explains it away.

A surrendered person wants the Father's will.

A proud person wants the Lord's name attached to their own will.

This passage is not meant to crush honest faith. It is meant to remove false confidence so that honest faith can live.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us away from appearance and into communion.

He invites us to stop hiding behind religious words and come honestly into His presence.

He invites us to exchange performance for surrender.

He invites us to let the Father's will become more than an idea. He calls us to receive it as the path of life.

This invitation is deeply personal.

Come to Christ before you work for Christ.

Know Him before you speak for Him.

Abide in Him before you act in His name.

Let His words search you, cleanse you, correct you, and restore you.

If this passage unsettles you, do not run from Jesus. Run to Him. The One who warns against false profession is the same One who receives the poor in spirit. The One who says, "I never knew you," to those who cling to iniquity is the same One who says, "Come unto me," to the weary and heavy laden.

There is still grace.

There is still mercy.

There is still time to know Him truly.

The question is not whether you can present an impressive record before God. The question is whether you will come to Jesus with an honest heart and allow Him to make you His own.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Search my heart with mercy and truth.

Do not allow me to hide behind religious words, outward service, or the approval of others. Bring me into a real relationship with Jesus.

Lord, forgive me where I have spoken Your name while resisting Your will. Forgive me where I have valued appearance more than surrender, activity more than communion, and reputation more than obedience.

Teach me to know You.

Let my life be rooted in Christ and shaped by the Father's will.

Make my obedience the fruit of love, not the mask of pride.
Keep me close to Jesus, now and always.
Amen.

Journal Notes

What am I most tempted to rely on as proof that I am spiritually safe?

Where might I be using religious words while resisting God's will?

Is there any area where I am busy for God but distant from God?

What does it mean for me to know Jesus, not merely know about Him?

Where is Jesus inviting me from outward appearance into deeper surrender?

What fruit would show that my faith is becoming obedience through love?

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The Wise and Foolish Builders

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Scripture
"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine,
and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man,
which built his house upon a rock:
And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the
winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell
not: for it was founded upon a rock.
And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and
doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man,
which built his house upon the sand:
And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the
winds blew, and beat upon that house;
and it fell: and great was the fall of it.
And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these
sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:
For he taught them as one having authority, and not
as the scribes."
Matthew –7:2429, KJV
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When Jesus Spoke

Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount with a picture no one on that hillside would easily forget.

Two men build houses.

Two houses face the storm.

One stands.

One falls.

At first, the houses may have looked similar. Both builders may have worked with effort. Both may have planned, gathered materials, and raised walls. From a distance, both houses may have seemed secure.

But the difference was hidden beneath the surface.

One man built on rock.

The other built on sand.

Jesus does not end His sermon by asking His hearers whether they were moved by His words. He does not ask whether they admired His teaching, repeated His phrases, or felt astonished by His authority.

He asks whether they will do what He has said.

The wise man hears and does.

The foolish man hears and does not do.

The difference is not exposure to truth. Both hear.

The difference is response.

Understanding the Setting

Those who listened to Jesus knew the land around the Sea of Galilee. They knew the dry beds that could look harmless in summer and become dangerous in the rainy season. Ellen White describes how mountain streams could disappear during dry

months, leaving dusty channels, but when winter storms came, those channels became fierce torrents that swept away houses built on the plains. Houses built high upon rock were harder to build and less convenient to reach, but they stood when wind, flood, and tempest came.

Jesus used that familiar scene to bring His sermon to its final decision.

The issue was not whether the crowd had heard truth.

They had.

They had heard the kingdom described with divine clarity. They had heard about poverty of spirit, mourning for sin, meekness, mercy, purity, peacemaking, forgiveness, secret prayer, trust in the Father, the narrow gate, false prophets, and empty profession.

Now the question was unavoidable.

Would they build their lives on His words?

Or would they admire His words while continuing to build somewhere else?

The people were deeply moved. The beauty of Christ's teaching drew them, yet obeying Him would require a change in their habits of thought and action. It would bring them into conflict with long-established religious assumptions. Many hearts responded, but few were ready to accept His words as the actual guide of life.

That is still the question at the end of every encounter with Scripture.

Not merely: Did I understand?

Not merely: Was I moved?

But: Will I build here?

Understanding the Teaching

Jesus contrasts wisdom and foolishness.

In Scripture, wisdom is not merely intelligence. It is the capacity to live rightly before God. A wise person sees reality as God reveals it and orders life accordingly. A foolish person may be clever, capable, and religiously informed, but still refuses to submit life to God's truth.

The wise builder hears the words of Jesus and does them.

He does not treat Christ's words as decoration. He treats them as foundation. He allows the teaching of Jesus to go beneath visible behaviour and reshape the hidden structure of the life.

That is why rock-building takes time.

It requires digging.

It requires surrender.

It requires the slow work of allowing Christ to challenge the heart: anger, lust, pride, revenge, anxiety, hypocrisy, judgement, divided loyalty, and spiritual self-deception.

The foolish builder also hears.

This is important.

Jesus does not describe a person who never listened. He describes a person who heard but did not obey. The foolish builder may admire the sermon. He may remember the sermon. He may speak about the sermon. But he does not make Christ's words the foundation of his life.

The tragedy is not ignorance.

The tragedy is unpractised truth.

Jesus also makes clear that storms come to both houses.

The rain falls on both.

The floods rise against both.

The winds beat upon both.

The difference between wisdom and foolishness is not that one life faces trouble while the other avoids it. The difference is what remains when trouble reveals the foundation.

Storms expose what ordinary weather hides.

A life can look stable while conditions are calm. A faith can look strong while untested. A character can look settled while unpressured. But the storm reveals what was always true beneath the surface.

This storm may include suffering, temptation, disappointment, loss, persecution, moral pressure, spiritual crisis, or final judgement. In every case, the point is the same: only the life built on Christ will stand.

Ellen White says that whoever receives the words of Christ and makes them the foundation of character and life is building on Christ, the Rock of Ages. She also notes that the Word of God is the only steadfast thing our world knows, and that heaven and earth may pass away, but Christ's words will not pass away.

This is the heart of the passage.

The rock is not human strength.

The rock is Christ received through His Word.

Rediscovering the Heart of God

This passage reveals a God who wants our lives to stand.

Jesus does not end His sermon with a trap. He ends it with mercy. He tells us plainly what kind of foundation will endure before the storm comes.

He does not flatter us.

He does not leave us guessing.

He does not allow us to confuse hearing with obedience or emotion with transformation.

He says, in effect: Build where life can hold.

This is the faithfulness of God. He tells us the truth before the flood rises. He exposes false security before collapse. He invites us to build on what cannot be shaken.

The Father revealed by Jesus is not interested in temporary religious enthusiasm. He desires a life restored from the foundation upward. He wants the inner person strengthened by truth, the heart rooted in grace, the will surrendered in love, and the whole life brought into harmony with His kingdom.

God's love is practical.

He does not merely comfort us in the storm. He prepares us before the storm.

He gives us His Word.

He gives us Christ.

He gives us a foundation.

This passage also reveals that God's authority is life-giving. The crowd was astonished because Jesus taught "as one having authority, and not as the scribes." His authority did not crush the sincere. It exposed illusion, healed confusion, and called people into reality.

The authority of Jesus is not cold domination.

It is the authority of truth.

It is the authority of the One who knows the storm, knows the house, knows the foundation, and knows the way to life.

Looking Within

This final picture asks a direct question:

What am I building on?

Many people build on feelings. When faith feels alive, they are strong. When feelings fade, the house trembles.

Some build on religious habit. They attend, repeat, participate, and serve, but the words of Jesus do not reach the hidden places.

Some build on knowledge. They can explain doctrine, quote Scripture, and discuss theology, but they resist the obedience that truth requires.

Some build on reputation. They depend on being seen as faithful, spiritual, or mature.

Some build on comfort. They follow Christ as long as the path does not disturb their plans.

Some build on self-confidence. They believe they will stand because they know themselves, trust themselves, and manage themselves.

But sand can feel firm until the rain comes.

Jesus invites us to examine not the appearance of the house, but the foundation beneath it.

Where have I heard His words but not done them?

Where have I admired mercy but withheld forgiveness?

Where have I praised purity but tolerated secret compromise?

Where have I spoken of trust but lived in anxiety?

Where have I agreed with the narrow gate but continued on the broad road?

Where have I called Him Lord but resisted the Father's will?

This passage does not ask these questions to condemn sincere hearts. It asks them so that we may build rightly while there is time.

The wise builder is not the person who never failed.

The wise builder is the person who lets the words of Jesus become the foundation.

That means repentance is part of building.

Confession is part of building.

Obedience in small things is part of building.

Returning to Christ after failure is part of building.

Choosing the hidden will of God over the visible approval of people is part of building.

The house stands not because the builder is impressive, but because the foundation is sure.

An Invitation from Jesus

Jesus invites us to move from hearing to doing.

The whole Sermon on the Mount now comes to rest on this call.

Do not only hear about poverty of spirit. Come empty-handed to God.

Do not only hear about mercy. Show mercy.

Do not only hear about purity. Bring the hidden life to Christ.

Do not only hear about forgiveness. Release the debt.

Do not only hear about prayer. Enter the secret place.

Do not only hear about the Father's care. Trust Him with tomorrow.

Do not only hear about the narrow gate. Enter.

Do not only hear about false prophets. Test the fruit.

Do not only say, "Lord, Lord." Do the will of the Father.

This is not a call to anxious striving. It is a call to living union with Christ. We build on the rock by receiving His Word, trusting His grace, and allowing His life to shape ours.

The sermon ends, but the invitation remains open.

The storm will come.

The question is whether our lives will be founded upon Christ.

Today, Jesus calls us to build again where the foundation is sure. Bring Him the parts of your life that have been built too quickly, too proudly, too carelessly, or too far from His Word.

Let Him rebuild what cannot stand. Let Him strengthen what is weak. Let Him teach you the wisdom of obedience.

The wise life is not the easiest life to build.

But it is the life that stands.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for giving us a foundation that cannot be moved.

Forgive us for the times we have heard Your Word but not obeyed it. Forgive us for building on feelings, reputation, habit, knowledge, comfort, or self-confidence instead of building on Christ.

Lord Jesus, make Your words the foundation of our lives. Teach us to do what You have spoken. Let our faith become more than admiration. Let it become surrender, obedience, trust, and love.

When the storms come, keep us founded upon You.

Amen.

Journal Notes

Where have I heard the words of Jesus but delayed obedience?

What foundation am I most tempted to rely on besides Christ?

Which part of the Sermon on the Mount has most clearly exposed something unstable in my life?

What would it look like to build on the rock in one ordinary decision today?

Where might my spiritual life look stable outwardly but remain weak beneath the surface?

How is Jesus inviting me to move from admiration to obedience?

Also by Teresa Oelofse