



Workbook & Devotional

Devotional by Louie Marsh

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Introduction

Hello and thanks for taking part in **Radical: Sermon on the Mount, The Inside Out, Upside Down Kingdom of God.** (*Winner of the longest title for a Spiritual Growth Campaign ever!*) This is our Spiritual Growth Campaign for 2017 and I'm glad you are going to part of it.

Let me just briefly explain what this little booklet is all about.

First of all just about everything you'll need to take part in this Spiritual Growth Campaign can be found in this book. All of the devotionals and all the lesson outlines are here. Besides this booklet all you'll need is your Bible, the teaching DVD's and something that can play them (or you can stream them off of the CCR website) and a group of people to sit down with to go through them.

Oh yes, and you'll want to be in church every Sunday throughout this Campaign to hear the sermons and fill out your outlines as well.

This year we're dealing with the most famous body of teaching that we have from Jesus: The Sermon on the Mount. We'll be talking about some of the basic concepts Jesus presents on Sunday mornings as I seek to define just how radical these teachings really are.

Like last year Amy and I will be team teaching each mid-week lesson. These lessons will focus on applying the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount to different areas of your life. We hope you'll like this new approach and find it helpful.

The devotionals you'll find here are not designed to be in depth studies. Rather they are meant to get you thinking about the aspects of the Sermon on the Mount that I'm preaching on each week. They are short and to the point and I hope you find them helpful as well. You won't get any devotionals on Sunday so you'll have a day to catch up if you fall behind.

As always I'm looking for your feedback, Please let me know what you like and what you don't like, what you find helpful and anything that isn't helpful to you. I'm always trying to make our ministries better and need your feedback to do so.

Thanks again for taking part and God bless you!!

- Louie



DEVOTIONAL

Week One:

Salt, Light & Hype

Week 1, Monday: Salt—What It Is

The fairest thing in nature, a flower, still has its roots in earth and manure. D. H. Lawrence

¹³ *"You are the salt of the earth, Matthew 5:13a (ESV)*

At times it seems incredible what we choose to focus on. Watch some TV "news" programs and you'll see what I mean. Isn't it amazing how much is spent talking about fairly mundane things like salt for example? I've got hypertension so of course I've been told hundreds of times about avoiding salt. Well, not completely or else I'll die, but you know what I mean right?

Because we focus on salt in terms of our health it's only natural that we carry that over to a verse like this one. But that's a mistake and here's why. Back in Jesus day the kind of salt they used isn't like what we use and was often used as a fertilizer. Some commentators suggest that since Jesus is talking about "salt of the earth (soil)" this is probably what's he's referring too. The salts in Jesus' day were mixtures of chlorides of sodium, magnesium, and potassium, with very small amounts of calcium sulfate (gypsum) not the sodium chloride that we use.

It turns out that salt has been used for centuries as a way to preserve and enrich fertilizer. A 19th- century agricultural reference volume notes that "Salt is applicable in all cases in which...fermented dung cannot be carted at once to land. Covering the heap with salt will be found a cheap and effective means of checking fermentation." So salt brings new life and growth were they was decay before.

That's exactly how we can become the salt of the earth. By going places and befriending people who may be chin deep in dung and need some help, some encouragement and some love. If you want a good example of this try our Tube Float Outreach for example. We show love and support to a lot of messed up people, hoping to plant some seeds and help turn back to God, minus the preaching or moralizing. We're not there to criticize just to be salt and hopefully bring some health into the pile of dung they've gotten themselves into. **So do you want me to fertilize today Lord?**

Week 1, Tuesday: *Saltless Salt Isn't Salt At All*

¹³ *...if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. Matthew 5:13b (ESV)*

Nobody likes having salt rubbed into their wounds, even if it is the salt of the earth.—Rebecca West

We're still talking about salt today because it turns out that salt can lose its saltiness. While this isn't true of our salt today, it is true of the older forms of it used in Jesus' day.

Over time some elements would be washed out of the salt effectively disintegrating it. Disintegrated salt loses a small amount of gypsum, which changes its "saltiness." This change in saltiness makes it a less effective fertilizing agent. So when Jesus talked to his followers about losing their saltiness, he was talking about losing their fertilizing properties, their ability to bring about life and growth.

I'm sure we've all had this experience. We get off track, make excuses for our sin instead of overcoming it, and slowly we find some of the necessary ingredient's necessary for spiritual growth and health have washed out of our souls. Where I was once spiritually alive now I'm just kind of hanging on. Where once I was making an impact for Christ on the lives of others around me, now it seems they are effecting me more than I am them. My witness is weak because my saltiness is going, going, almost gone.

I hope this verse serves as a reality check for all of us. And no, I'm not trying to rub salt into your wound, but am trying to sound a wake up call. The sermon the mount is full of these kind of moments and if you take it seriously it'll challenge you nearly ever step of your way through it. This requires me to be willing to see myself as I am not as I wish I was. It also requires me to be willing to be different and out of step with much of what the world around me says is right.

Lord help me to spend time today in a spiritual check-up. Where I'm lacking saltiness help me to turn around & become a radical follower of your's Jesus and just as salty as I can be. Amen.

Week 1, Wednesday: *The Character of Light*

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world...Matthew 5:14a (ESV)

When walking through the 'valley of shadows,' remember, a shadow is cast by a Light. - Austin O'Malley

Light has been around far longer than human beings have. Without there could be no life as we know it. It's vital to all of life and yet—today with all our advanced knowledge and technology—we still don't know what light *is*.

For a very long time physicists have argued about this and haven't really been able to prove their theories one way or the other. Some say that light is composed of particles because in some ways it seems to behave that way you'd expect a stream of particles would. But others say it comes in waves because it does other things, like being reflected and refracted, that only a wave can do.

So which is it? Pay your nickel (or whatever inflation has made that into) and take your choice because *no one really knows*.

Strange isn't it? Light is nearly everywhere and yet while we make use of it, and know how to produce it, we don't know what it is. Gravity is like that as well. It's a universal constant yet we understand very little about. But notice that our lack of understanding doesn't change things at all. Light remains light, and gravity still works, whether I understand it or not.

So too are disciple of Jesus. Whether we are understood or not, whether we understand what we're called up on to do or not, and whether we act like it or not, *we are the light of the world*. God has chosen us to shine his light of truth into the world and he's not going back on that call on our lives. If we choose to hide our light (more on that tomorrow) he's not going to change his plan and make a new source of light.

We are it! That's a huge responsibility and a huge blessing as well. **Lord help me to realize today that I AM a source of the Gospel's light in this world. May that change my heart & mind and may my actions better reflect this truth.**

Week 1, Thursday: *Light Is Made To Be Seen*

¹⁵ *Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.*
Matthew 5:15 (ESV)

We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.—Plato

It's a ridiculous picture that Jesus draws here. Putting a lamp under a basket is crazy. Especially in his day when lamps didn't use lightbulbs but flame! That's not just dumb it's dangerous and you just might burn your whole house down doing something that silly.

But like he always did Jesus make a powerful point very clear. Light, by it's very nature, is *made to be seen*. There are many things in the universe that are, by design, usually unseen. But light isn't one of them. Light blazes forth and not only brings illumination to all who see it, but automatically draws a sharp contrast between itself and the darkness that surrounds it.

Why on earth would you hide a light unless you are trying to hide from others or hide from the light itself? Could Plato be right? Are we, who are called children of the Light, actually be *afraid of it*?

Yes of course he's right. When we invite the darkness into our lives in any of it's varied forms, then we begin to shun the light, hide the light or try to hide ourselves from the light. For the light gives me no choice in the matter. I'm either in it or I'm not. You can argue about a lot of things, but in the end it's pretty clear to anyone who wants to see it whether or not I'm living in light or darkness.

Remember that the next time you're tempted to deny a sin, or lie about having a problem you know you have, or to either lie for someone else or maybe control them. Light is made to be seen—so *let it shine—inside you first and then everywhere*. **Lord, help me run to the light of your love today and not flee it in fear of the truth & clarity it brings. Amen.**

Week 1, Friday: *If You've Got It—Flaunt It!*

¹⁶ *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works...* Matthew 5:16a (ESV)

When you can't make them see the light, make them feel the heat.—Ronald Reagan

Jesus didn't just say to shine your light and leave it up to so to figure out what that might look like. It's a good thing too. Today's there's all kinds of silliness when it comes to this. Often I hear people say things like "I'm sending healing light ways to you," or "may you be covered with white light," (BTW is that racist?) when they hear about someone being ill. They call that being light. I call it being deluded and deceived.

You and I don't get to somehow project light into the cosmos or something. It might sound cool to you but it's not even remotely related to what Jesus is saying here. He's saying let people see that you are light by *what* you do and *how* you do it.

The what is good works. Of course this could mean a nearly limitless number of things. From feeding the poor to working in the 3rd world to helping someone across the street. Everyday is filled with chances for us to do something nice and needed for someone else. When he grab that opportunity we are in fact doing a good work. Letting people see that is important. Not because it feeds our little egos and helps our self-esteem. No, it's important for another reason we'll talk about tomorrow.

For now it's important to remember we are called to *let our light shine* and that means doing all the good we can for who ever we can whenever we can. That's pretty simple isn't it? Just be as much like Jesus as you can. He went around teaching and healing and feeding people etc. We can go around praying for healing, sharing our testimony and doing what we can to feed the hungry as well. We can raise funds to help others, walk against cancer or domestic violence, etc.

Lord, help me to not just think about this today *but to actually do it!* Let me do something good in Jesus Name!

Week 1, Saturday: *All To the Glory of God*

¹⁶ *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* Matthew 5:16 (ESV)

Worship is a way of seeing the world in the light of God.—Abraham Joshua Heschel

Yesterday I said there was a reason to do good works in public and here it is—*so that people will see it and give GOD the glory!* Not you or me, just God.

Some say that's not fair, yet that is the goal of the disciple of Jesus. For people to be impressed with what God is doing in me, not with what I'm doing. God is always the goal in the Christian life. If we can stay focused on him and do what we do for him then people will be drawn to him.

In the end that's the overriding goal of all we do. We hope that people will see the glory of the God and the truth of the Gospel by what we do and how we do it. Then they'll ask us about what we believe and then we can effectively share our faith with them. Good works help open the door so that people will listen to what we have to say. It's a great way to *show* before we try and *tell*.

Clearly Jesus is setting this forth as a communication model for his followers. He wants us to shine his light. He wants others to see Christ in us not only by what we do but also how we do it. Our works must be done in joy. If I do the right thing in a grumpy, grudging way no one is doing to see God in that. Just as we are commanded to speak the truth in love so also are we called to do loving acts of kindness and service in a loving and joyful way. If we can't do that then maybe we need to take some time to get ourselves straightened out and salty and enlightened before we go out there and turn a chance to be a good witness into being a bad one.

Lord, the world is full of bad witnesses. Help me to be a good one today, to draw people closer to you by all that I do and so, and let my motives & actions be done in your will and your spirit. Amen!



DEVOTIONAL

Week Two:

A Different of Love

Week 2, Monday: What Love Isn't

Alcohol may be man's worst enemy, but the bible says love your enemy. Frank Sinatra

⁴⁴ *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, Matthew 5:44 (ESV)*

This command (it's *not* just a "saying") of Jesus has got to be one of the most misunderstood statements he ever made. As you can see Mr. Sinatra's comment above, it gives rise to a lot of doubt that it's even remotely possible. Wise cracks aside there's a very good reason for this and it's not that hard to find either.

The main reason we struggle with Christ's command is because we really don't know what love is. That should sound incredible given how much we're always talking about it. Not just the church but our entire culture has been punch drunk on love for decades now. Remember the Beatles telling us, "All you need is love?" Remember they sang that to us shortly before they broke up? Hmm...as I seem to recall it wasn't the most loving break up either.

You see most people believe that love is an emotion. Now if that's true then you can see why Jesus' command seems to be absolutely impossible. After all if I have good feelings towards you, if I'm overwhelmed with positive feelings about how great you are and how much I need to be with you, then almost by definition you aren't my enemy. But if you've done bad things to me and are my enemy then I won't—and can't—have good feelings towards you now can I?

The solution to this is not that Jesus was wrong but that *we are*. **Love, as defined and shown in the Bible, isn't an emotion.** It can give rise to emotions, but in and of itself love isn't one. So almost all the sappy, sentimental heart rending songs I grew up listening to ended up leading me astray. Love isn't something you just feel. It's not an emotion that comes and goes according to what's happening to or around me. Love is something far more profound than that. Tomorrow I'll attempt to tell a little bit about what love is, today though let's pray that God can help us get a clear grasp on what love is, and that we can develop a firm commitment to actually loving the people in our lives who are opposed to us and perhaps are doing harm to us. Sound impossible? Stay tuned!

Week Two, Tuesday: What Love Is

To love is to act.—Victor Hugo

¹⁰ *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*
1 John 4:10 (ESV)

As I said yesterday love **is not** just a feeling. The Greek word *Agape*, which is often but not exclusively used of God's love in the New Testament, has been defined as "intelligent good will." When you study it in the New Testament you find that almost every time it, or the other words for love, are used they refer to actions.

Love is something you do. That's a line for an old song we used to sing in my Youth Group, which makes it nearly ancient actually! Anyway—the point is that song is right. Victor Hugo is right also. You *cannot love without acting*. If you think you love something but don't act in a way that's best for them, guess what? You don't love them. You may have strong feels about them. But you do not love them the way God loves us and commands us to love each other as well as our enemies.

"For God so loved the world that He **gave...**" (*John 3:16*) You see that God's love is all about *acting*, doing what's best for the object of his love (humanity). It's not just feelings. It's not doing what people want you to do either. People who are codependents, or rescuers, or control freaks or who manipulate others always profess to be doing this because they love you and want what's best for you. But none of those things are love.

They, and actions like them, are really their selfish need masquerading as love. But true love isn't selfish and is **never** controlling and never violates God's commands. God is love, every single one of his commands is an expression of perfect love; so violating them isn't love at all. It's self-centered sin and that's all.

So love is not just doing, and certainly not doing what I want too. It's acting as Jesus acted, as God commands us to act, and doing those things in a loving, gracious, humble way. Love is action that gives rise to emotions but isn't one.

Week 2, Wednesday: Who Do You Love?

"Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained." —C.S. Lewis

⁴⁵ ... For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
Matthew 5:45a (ESV)

So we've seen that we are told to love our enemies but who else? I mean what about all those people out there who aren't either friends or enemies? You know, the acquaintances in your life, the people you don't really know but who you usually recognize when you see them. Am I supposed to love them too?

You probably guess it by now—yes you are. We are to love everyone we come into contact with. Now obviously this does away with any thought of love being a good feeling or emotion. No one can have good feeling towards everyone on the planet. So when I'm told to love everyone what that boils down too is simply this: *I'm committed to doing good for anyone anytime I can.* If I have the opportunity then I'll take it even if that means sacrificing time, talent or energy to do so.

In May of 2016 I decided to hike to the bottom and the Grand Canyon & back out I one day. I made it, but believe me it was a loong day! As I neared the bottom I came across a young lady who had fallen and hurt her knee. She couldn't do the deep steps downward alone. So I offered to help her and got her down and to the boat she was scheduled to catch. I didn't know her and will probably never see her again. But for that moment I was given the chance to help her and I did. I got to share a little of my life with her and hope that I was able to plant a few seeds in her heart about how much God loves her and wants to care for her by sending me along to help a bit.

That's how you love everyone, but being a servant of Jesus and being willing to upend your plans when you see a chance to follow his plan and love (help) someone else. It turns out love isn't really that complicated after all.

Week 2, Thursday: Loving My Enemies

"The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people." — G.K. Chesterton

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, Matthew 5:43-44 (ESV)

As he so often was Chesterton is absolutely right. Most of our enemies are our neighbors. By this I don't mean those who live next door but people who are in your life. Very often they are quite close. Family members, people you work with, members of your church or community group.

It's very unusual for someone who isn't close to you to notice you enough to be your enemy. It's the people close to me that I offend, neglect and perhaps make feel insecure. That's enough to turn them into enemies, whether they actively seek to do my harm or not. This is true whether I've actually done something to them or they just think I have. When people harden their hearts towards another and pull away from them they are in fact enemies of that person or group.

And Jesus says those who follow him must love the people who oppose them and pray for those who persecute them. Now persecute is often misunderstood. Did you notice that in the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus talks persecution he said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me." Insults and false accusations can be a form of persecution. And anyone who persecutes me is my enemy.

The truth is that much if not most of the time the enemies who are talking trash about you will be people who are in close proximity to you. Loving them will be all the more difficult because of this. It's a lot easier to love someone far away who doesn't irritate you every day than it is to love someone who's always getting in your face. To really love them will require prayer, for them and for myself. I must pray that God blesses them, changes them and loves them through me.

Week 2, Friday: Called To Be Different

"To see something different gives you a chance to be something different!" — Mehmet Murat ildan

⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?
Matthew 5:46-47 (ESV)

Jesus strikes a chord here that carries through everything he taught in the Gospels. If you are going to be a follower of Jesus then you are going to have go "above and beyond" what seems to be reasonable and you are going to have to be different from the people around you and the culture you live in.

He's not talking about external things like clothes or how your hair is done for it men have to have (or not have depending) a beard. These things are all external, more than a little silly and in the end don't say anything about your character. No Jesus here is speaking about *how* we act and *what we do*.

Specifically he is saying that loving those who love you isn't a mark of being his disciple because *everyone* does it. It's completely natural and normal in any culture and is the least you can do. But Jesus never called us to be or do the least. We are called to a higher level of thinking and feeling and doing and being.

We are called to be different. If you don't get anything else out of the Sermon on the Mount I sure hope you get this. If you are a disciple of Jesus you don't worry all that much about fitting in with those around you. You do concern yourself with fitting in to God's plan, living God's way and pleasing God in every part of your life.

Believe me, if you are focused on living for God alone—then *you are different*. Because living that way is about as unnatural as you can get. Focusing on me and mine is the natural thing to do, and it's quite reasonable as well. Why shouldn't I care for those who care for me and disregard those who are my enemy?

As we've seen Jesus calls us to love our enemies because that's part of being the different kind of person he wants his disciples to be. We are called to be different. Not for the sake of being different or being a rebel or a nonconformist. No, there 's a far more important reason to be different and we'll discuss that tomorrow. Till then, don't worry about fitting in with those around you, focus on fitting in with God and his plan for your life.

Week 2, Saturday: Called to Be Like Christ

Being a Christian is more than just an instantaneous conversion - it is a daily process whereby you grow to be more and more like Christ.—Billy Graham

⁴⁴ ... pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven...
Matthew 5:44b-45a (ESV)

This is the real reason Jesus told us to be different. If we are going to be like Jesus, that is be true Sons of our Father in Heaven, then *we have to be different*.

Just look at Jesus. Talk about a nonconformist. He wasn't like anyone else. He didn't act like the Jews wanted him too, didn't behave like a Roman and never gave into the conformity of sin either. Jesus is a totally unique character who is unlike anyone who has ever lived.

He was different and calls to be that same sort of difference as well.

That's the essence of discipleship because being a disciple isn't just being a student or a learner. It's learning from your Master and then *changing yourself and your behavior to be like the Master*. That's what the word disciple meant in the time of Christ and that's the eternal challenge he always lays before us.

Don't be like others—be like Christ. Don't follow any authority that dares to deviate from the teachings of Christ. Dare to lose any or even all your friends if that's what it takes to make Jesus your best friend and live in obedience to him!

That's what our calling as followers of Jesus is. It's not just to be nice people who say nice things and help people who aren't nice to become nice as nicely as possible. You never see Jesus doing that. Instead we are called to allow God to radically change us in every way, from top to bottom, from the *inside out*, so that we will in fact become like our great redeemer and Lord—Jesus! **Do you think you're ready for that? Is that what you really want?**



DEVOTIONAL
Week Three:
Motivations

Week 3, Monday: My Messy Motivations

We would frequently be ashamed of our good deeds if people saw all of the motives that produced them.
- Francois de La Rochefoucauld

¹ *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 6:1 (ESV)*

Whatever else you can say about Jesus and what he taught us it's pretty clear that he always wanted us to go deep. Don't just look the part—be the part. Don't settle for merely doing the least, but do all you can whenever you can for the glory of God.

All of these things speak to our motivations of course. Jesus didn't create a faith that was all outward and nothing about what you really are on the inside. That's what the Judaism of his day had become and he wanted nothing to do with it.
²⁷ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. Matthew 23:27 (ESV)*

This is one of the most deadly traps we all face on our spiritual pilgrimage. The more I understand how big the challenge is for me to become like Christ, the easier it is to settle for *acting spiritual* instead of actually *becoming spiritual*. The challenge to actually become a new person is far larger than most people think when they begin to follow Jesus. But as we grow our sinfulness is exposed we become aware of just how deeply we need the transforming that only Christ can do.

So it's true that our motives are messy. They tend to be a mixture of that could be summed up as the good, the bad and the ugly. This isn't something we need to share with everyone, because they really don't need to know all that and besides they've got their own messy motivations to deal with as well.

So while we don't need to “overshare” we don't want to fall into denial and pretend our motives are practically pure either. Let's be honest with ourselves and make motivations a matter of ongoing prayer and concern as we continue to follow Jesus. **Lord, help me see my motives for what they are—amen!**

Week 3, Tuesday: Jesus' Motivations

Mere heathen morality, and not Jesus Christ, is preached in most of our churches. - George Whitefield

⁴⁵ *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*
Mark 10:45 (ESV)

If mixed motivations are a problem and discipleship is all about becoming like Jesus then the next obvious question is, *What were Jesus' motivations?* There's no doubt he was a motivated man. He clearly had a purpose and he moved through his life with that purpose always uppermost in his mind. Everything he said and did was in service of that purpose and his motivation was to see that purpose accomplished.

Motives are very hard to understand because you can't see them. You can only watch what people say and do and then see what that implies about why they might be doing it. Of course this is a course that is fraught with the potential for gross error and should only be undertaken with the greatest of care.

But it's pretty much the same thing when we try and understand our own motives. We can't see those either and it's surprisingly easy to lie to myself about why I'm say what I say or doing what I do. I honestly think that lying to myself is much easier than falling off a log, to use an old expression. In fact it's so difficult to clearly understand myself and my motives that David ask God to do it on his behalf.

²³ *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!* ²⁴ *And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!* Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV) David understood that he couldn't clearly see himself and even when he did it was very difficult to be honest about what he was seeing. So he invoked divine intervention to help him understand his hidden motives.

If you want to pray about something today I would suggest that's a great place to start. Why not make David's prayer your prayer? And maybe not just for today for use it on a regular basis as you seek to have pure motives in your service go God and others. Dealing with my motives isn't easy, but it is essential, and so is seeking God's help to do it.

Week 3, Wednesday: “When” Disciples Gotta Do It

“If not us, who? If not now, when?” - John F. Kennedy

When you give to the needy...when you pray...when you fast... - Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount

When you study the Bible, or listen to a sermon or speech, or read a book, or listen to music don't forget to pay attention to the little things. Little things, who has time for that? I'm looking for the big things, the powerful things, the important things, things that will change my life. I don't have time for small, unimportant, picky little details.

It is true that you can get all wrapped up in details and miss the big picture. We've all been in situations where we couldn't "see the forest for the trees." But the opposite of that is just as true. We all missed details that later we wished we hadn't. Little things are easy to over look but that doesn't mean they aren't important. Size and importance are not related. If you've ever tried to proof read anything you know how true that is.

So note the little word "when" in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus doesn't say, "if" you pray, or "if" you give or "if" you fast—no he says **when**. This shows that he knows his listeners *will* do these things and he's concerned that they are don't in the *right way (motives again)*.

So when do you pray or give or fast? Yeah, it's that last one the trips up most American Christians. It's fairly obvious that by and large (pun intended) we aren't doing very much of that. But we ought to be doing all of these things and doing them regularly. This was obvious to the Jews who first heard the Sermon on the Mount. They did all of these things on a regular basis and according to very detailed instructions from their Rabbi's.

It was "when" for them, but for many of us it's "if." Let's be honest here and if this is true of me then I need to take this change to ask God to change my heart, discipline myself and make these things a regular part of my spiritual life. So don't say, "whenever" when you read this—instead say **with your help Lord, I'll start DOING what you want me too.**

Week 3 Thursday: Beware Public Prayer

A man who prays much in private will make short prayers in public. ~ D.L. Moody

⁶ *But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6 (ESV)*

As a Pastor I end up doing a whole lot of public praying. I'm not so sure this is good for me, but I do it anyway. I pray at weddings, funerals, baby dedications, church services, Bible Studies, Town Council Meetings, Marine Raider Reunions, Veterans Day Celebrations, and of course at lots of public meals (like our Lunch with Louie where we go out to eat nearly every Sunday after church. BTW—that's lunch *with* Louie, *not* Lunch *on* Louie! I do pray for you, but don't pay for you! Just wanted to make sure that was clear).

So doing all this public praying makes me some sort of expert on it I guess. I mean I don't have a degree in PublicPrayerology or anything, but I've sure done a lot of it. And because I have done a lot of it I agree with the two quotes above whole heartedly.

Public prayer is a necessity. We need to pray at meetings and we should. Many times that means we need someone to lead us, and that's fine. But it also means the one leading has to deal with a host of hidden motives. We have to avoid trying to sound good to people. People will tell what a "good" prayer that was. So what exactly does a "bad prayer" look like anyway?

When praying in public I have to avoid "preaching at people over God's shoulder." And old expression about the tendency to throw a few zingers at the people or to add into the prayer that point I forgot to make in my sermon. Or to sneak in my point of view on something I heard and disagreed with.

The point of all this is not to discourage public prayer—but to urge you to prepare for it. If you've engage with the last two devotionals you are going to be ok, if not then please so before you do much public praying, you can thank me later!

Week 3, Friday: Just Say It!

“I have been seized by the power of a great affection.” — Brennan Manning,

⁵ *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* John 15:5 (ESV)

Once I admit that I don't have the power to change then I can begin to rely on the one who does have that power—Jesus. He is the vine and I am only a branch. I know you've probably heard that before but it's a very powerful metaphor and one that deserves to be pondered a bit.

When you examine a plant it's the vine, or the trunk that is the main concern. If you have to you can always cut off a branch, or lots of branches. But the vine or the trunk *is the plant* really. If it's not healthy then the branches have no hope at all. They are an extension of the vine, but the vine can survive quite nicely without them. They, on the other hand, can't survive at all without the vine.

Whether we like it or not, and many of us don't, the same thing is true for us. When we are separated from God by sin we are cut off from the very life we depend upon. It all flow through the vine and then into whatever branches there may be. Branches can come and go, but the vine remains.

One boundary I need to implement in my thinking is that apart from Jesus I can do nothing and am nothing. Just a dead or dying stick on the ground that really only good to be used as a fire starter. That's not exactly how I'd like my life to go and I'm sure that's not what God wants to do with me either.

I can and will do more, so much more, but only with God help. Only by remembering I am totally dependent upon the vine that is Christ. I only grow and serve and reach others when I'm strongly connected to the vine. Apart from him I really am nothing. I need to not just remember this but to live it out every day of my life. Only then can I over come my inability to change through the limitless power of Christ that can and will change me. **Lord Jesus, help me to remember that you are all and that I must strengthen my connection to you if you are to be real in my life Amen.**

Week 3, Saturday: My Father Knows Me

“What God knows about me is more important than what others think about me.” - Unknown

⁸ *Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.* Matthew 6:8 (ESV)

Jesus changed most people's entire approach to prayer in the one little line quoted above. This is another example of the importance of small things, but I digress!

Most people approach prayer in much the same way they approach a puzzle. If I can just figure out how all this fits together then I can get what I want/need. Or we approach prayer the way we approached our parents when we were kids about to ask them for something. When's the right time and place and what exactly do I need to do to influence them to give me what I want?

All of that evaporates, or should, when we read what Jesus said. Apparently a lot of Christian authors have somehow missed this verse. That's the only way I can explain the endless glut of silly books offering the “secret” formula for getting God to answer your prayer the way you want it answered. I've got one word for that—well one word I can use here anyway—**bunk!**

Not only is conning God impossible but attempting to do so is both unwise and harmful. God loves me and is my Father he knows me and my situation far better than I ever will. He knows what best for me and that's exactly what he wants to do for me. You don't have to try and weasel things you want from God. He's either going to give them to you or he's not. Your little “secrets of prayer” game is just that, a silly, stupid, unspiritual and unscriptural game that leads you no where good that's for sure.

So, instead of all that why don't we just drop the pretense and approach God like the loving, wise, compassionate, gracious Father that he is? Just *talk to him the way you'd talk to anyone else*. Open yourself up, pour out your heart, tell him what you want or think you need. Then submit to his wise will and gratefully accept whatever he chooses. If there's any “key” to prayer beyond the faith it takes to pray—I believe it's just being honest with God. Try it you might like it.



DEVOTIONAL

Week Four:

Worry Isn't In the Kingdom

Week 4, Monday: What, Me Worry?

As a rule, men worry more about what they can't see than about what they can.—Julius Caesar

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink... Matthew 6:25 (ESV)

Just about everyone worries. I'd say everyone but I'm pretty sure Jesus didn't and I know if I say that someone will claim they don't worry just to be ornery. But honestly, we've all worried about things. Some of us more than others as worry seems to be tied in part to certain personality types and of course relates to our spiritual maturity.

What I want to encourage today is that we think about worry from a spiritual perspective not just a psychological one. Jesus told us not to worry about our lives and then listed things we commonly do worry about. So it's clear that part of being a growing disciple of Jesus is trusting God more and worrying less. Yet many of us really struggle with this.

It's amazing to me that Christians in the western world, who as a rule are far more prosperous than their brother and sisters in the third world, seem to worry more than they do as well. I wonder if having more things, more stuff, tends to make you worry more about it? I know people would could put everything they own in one or maybe two suitcases. Meanwhile many American Christians have to rent storage space because their house is all filled up!

Yet the prosperous one worries more than the one without much. Sounds strange doesn't it? I believe part of the reason this happens (and it happens here as the rich worry more about taxes, etc. than the poor) is because the more I have the easier it is to want to grasp it to tightly. Then my stuff becomes an idol and I fear losing it because it's so important to me.

There's nothing wrong with possessions of course. But we've got to make sure we know who owns who. When they start owning me and dictating how I live my life, I need a reality check. Everything I am and own should be given to God, I must look at it as a loan from him and strive not to become too attached to anything or anyone down here. If I hold God's gifts loosely and hold God tightly, then I won't worry very often because I know I can trust him.

Week 4, Tuesday: Worry Is NEVER Good

Do not worry about your difficulties in Mathematics. I can assure you mine are still greater.—Albert Einstein

²⁶ *Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?* ²⁷ *And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*
Matthew 6:26-27 (ESV)

I've had a surprising number of people tell me that worry is good and even necessary to living life. You have to worry, people say, otherwise things will get out of control and bad things could happen.

The root to this problem is, I think, semantics. Most of the time if you talk to people who say this you will find they are using the worry as a synonym for concern. If you check a dictionary you'll see that while the two words can mean the same thing they usually don't. Worry connotes a stronger, deeper feeling. One that distracts you from other concerns in life and makes you focus on the object you are worrying about instead of God, other people, etc.

Worry is bad because not only does it distract you from God but it never accomplishes anything itself. It's an attempt at controlling things you do not, and usually cannot, control. It's a way to play God and end up doing nothing. You can spend all day worrying about your child or a friend or about your health etc. At the end of that day not only did you not do what you should have done, but *your worry didn't change a thing or help anyone*. Yes, you might have helped your blood pressure to rise and your ulcer to grow, but otherwise you managed to waste time that you can't get back for absolutely nothing at all.

Not good. Worry is a complete waste of our God given time, talents and energy which in return gives us nothing good and a whole of bad. It's clear your body wasn't designed to worry and if you choose to be a worrywart you'll pay for it physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually as well.

So why then do we do it? Habit is one answer. There's another answer we'll talk about tomorrow. Right now I just want us to honestly examine ourselves and see how much of a hold worry has on us and to make sure we are thinking about worry from a Biblical perspective not a personal or cultural one. Once I know that, then I can proceed to deal with things.

Week 4, Wednesday: Worry VS Trust in God

"Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength." — Corrie ten Boom

³⁰ ...O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' Matthew 6:30a-31 (ESV)

Yesterday we exposed worry as a self centered effort to exert control over just about everything in our lives. Today we want to talk a little bit about how to begin stop worrying. As always Jesus shows us the way by contrasting having faith against being a worry wart.

When it comes to the unknown you have a choice to make. I can worry about it and only do myself and perhaps others harm or I can trust God with it and see my faith grow and His Spirit move. When you get right down the root of it that's the choice that faces all us many times every single day.

Now when I say trust God that doesn't mean do nothing. Of course if I have health issues for example I'd be trying to live in a healthy way, eat right, get exercise and do what my doctor says. If I'm smart I'll do what I can to make things better in every situation. However, when that's all said and done my choice still remains. I can do what I can and then put the whole issue into God's hands and tell him I trust him and know he'll do what's right, or I can worry about it.

Guess which one is the healthier choice? Not worry! If you don't believe me just ask your doctor and he or she will tell you how unhealthy worry can be for you.

So it's a choice. A simple choice between worry and trust in God. Notice I said simple *not easy!* There's nothing easy about not worrying. If it was easy to quite most of us would have done it a long time ago.

It's very difficult but so what? When did Jesus ever call his disciples to do *anything* easy? None that I can recall. The way is steep and narrow he said. So, let's get started on this part of the narrow way by choosing to trust God, not ourselves.

Week 4, Thursday: My Father Knows Me

"To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear."
—Timothy Keller

³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.
Matthew 6:32 (ESV)

Yes, we talked about this on Saturday and we're going to talk about it again today. It's that important. Whether you are talking about prayer or worry or a host of other issues we always need to return to this immutable Biblical fact—God not only knows me completely, he loves me without measure.

As Tim Keller points out above we are not just known or not just loved, we are both fully known and loved by God. How amazing. It's a rare gift to find someone on earth who knows you so well yet loves you completely. But this isn't rare in our spiritual lives. No, it's the very basis of our redemption and the reason Jesus came to earth.

God, knowing us fully knew how deeply sinful and broken we are. He also knew just how much we needed a savior. Yet his knowledge of our darkness did not drive us away. Instead it prompted him to reach out to even more by sending his Son to become one of us, die for us, rise in victory over all the has broken us, and ascend into heaven showing the way back to God is open wide to everyone and is given as a gift.

Amazing isn't it? Yet that is the Gospel we believe in and preach to the world.

So how is it that we so quickly forget it when it comes to the daily challenges in our lives? We forget God knows and loves us and try to grab ahold of things through worry and stress. How foolish we are, throwing ourselves into turmoil in a vain effort to make things go our way when we could simply choose to trust God instead.

One of the reasons we don't make that choice is that in the moment of stress we forget just how well God knows us and loves us. God's knowledge and love for us are a package. You don't get one without the other. So instead of giving into worry reject it and remember God knows *exactly* what you are dealing with—better than you do actually! And yes, he still loves you. So choose to trust him instead of stressing yourself out and see what God and will do in your life.

Week 4 Friday: Seek the Kingdom First

"Seeking what is true is not seeking what is desirable." — Albert Camus

³³ *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*
Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

Jesus wraps up his brief teaching on worry with a command to do two things to counteract the influence of worry in our lives. In doing so he contrasts what the "gentiles" (non-Jews) seek after versus what followers of Christ should seek.

The Gentiles seek after wealth, clothing, food, etc. There isn't a culture anywhere that doesn't offer some outward and artificial objects to distract us from God. Jesus says don't be like them. Instead he tells us to seek *first* God's Kingdom and righteousness. So what's the Kingdom of God.

Well that's a pretty big topic. In Bible College they had a class for a whole semester on just this topic. I couldn't take it due to scheduling problems. At the end of the semester their consisted of just one question. What is the Kingdom of God. My roommate at that time spend hours writing out that answer. I was happy that I'd missed that one!

To put things in a nutshell let's just say that the Kingdom of God is the Rule of God. So wherever followers of Jesus are the Kingdom is too, because are allowing God to rule in their lives. The kingdom has no physical boundaries because it's not corporeal at all. It does with us as we go. So when the disciples traveled out of Israel in the New Testament the Kingdom went with the, and it grows as others accept Christ and become members of the Kingdom too.

So in seeking the Kingdom I'm first of all seeking Jesus. Once I find and commit my life to him I then seek to expand his rule both in my own life and the lives of others around me. The Kingdom grows within my as I allow God's Spirit to control more and more of my heart, mind and soul. It expands to others when I share my faith and they come to faith in Jesus.

Every disciple's priority—seeking God's rule in my life. Jesus is always first and all of my desires find their fulfillment in him.

Week 4, Saturday: Seek God's Righteousness First

It is not enough to be delivered from sin; it is enough to be delivered to righteousness. Edwin Louis Cole

³³ *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*
Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

What the difference between the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? This could be a form of parallelism where you say the same thing in two slightly different ways. "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." is an example of that. A King and a Lord are essentially the same.

Could be but I think there's more to it than that. I think Jesus mentions righteousness not only because it's an essential part of the very character of God's Kingdom, but because righteousness must be a commanding characteristic of Jesus' disciples if we are ever to reach the world for him.

Clearly we haven't done such a great job in that regard if you look at history. Why in jus the last 40 years here in America look at all the scandals involving "prominent" Christian leaders. It's not like people have no reason at all to call our churches hypocritical. Of course the people who say that are probably living in glass houses because they have plenty of hypocrisy themselves. But that doesn't negate the fact that the church is often very unrighteous,

Which isn't surprising. After all we're talking about fallen human beings here. We all sin and we all know it.

Which is probably one reason why Jesus emphasized this so much. We must not just seek righteousness from God. We must not just seek to live in a righteous manner. But we must do so *first!* Making sure our walk measures up to our talk has got to be a big priority in every disciples life.

If it doesn't then please shut up until you are starting to make progress. Few things do more damage to the Gospel than a hypocritical Christian preaching morality they do not keep themselves. May God deliver us from this!



DEVOTIONAL

Week Five:

Judging Judgmentally

Week 5, Monday: What Is Judging?

How easy it is to judge rightly after one sees what evil comes from judging wrongly! - Elizabeth Gaskell

¹ “Judge not, that you be not judged. Matthew 7:1 (ESV)

So here we at last. We’ve arrived at the most quoted very in the entire Sermon on the Mount. Quoted wrongly nearly every time to be sure, but most quoted none the less. Don’t judge. This is such a bugaboo in our culture that we’re going to spend a week look at it.

So what is judging anyway? When people say don’t judge do they even know or mean what they are saying? When I’m about to turn left am I supposed to abandon judgment of whether or not I have enough room and time and just for it? I hope not!

Here’s how renowned Bible and Greek Scholar A.T. Robertson defined it: *“The habit of censoriousness, sharp, unjust criticism. Our word critic is from this very word. It means to separate, distinguish, discriminate. That is necessary, but pre-judice (prejudgment) is unfair, captious criticism.”*

All judgement requires the one judging to separate, distinguish and discriminate. If you are trying to judge if that movie you saw is any good what do you do? You compare it to other movies of it’s type, you analyzed it’s plot, dialogue, etc. to see if they are better or worse than what you expected.

To judge then is to come to a decision based on an honest, fair and accurate evaluation. It’s not to condemn and especially it’s not to condemn in haste or unfairly.

Jesus isn’t tell us we can’t make judgements in life. Follow that and your life won’t be a long one. He’s telling us we can’t condemn others, and if we apply unfair standards to others God will apply those same standards to us. No one wants that. So, it turns out judging properly is not just a necessity, in the end it’s a good thing! Condemning however is not.

Week 5, Tuesday: Judging Judgmentally

“Don’t judge a man by his opinions, but what his opinions have made of him.” — Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

¹ “Judge not, that you be not judged. Matthew 7:1 (ESV)

I don’t mind being judged all that much. It happens all the time and that’s ok. But what gets me is people judging me and telling me not to judge at the same time. Now that’s annoying!

Why? Because it’s not just hypocritical it’s really dumb. Example: Every time I put up a blog or FaceBook post on certain hot button issues (like homosexuality or any moral issue really) I know I’m going to get at least a few replies quoting the verse above and telling me I shouldn’t judge these people.

As we saw yesterday this is not a correct or even sane interpretation of the passage. But I’ll let that go for just a second because there’s an even bigger problem with this. Here’s what really gets me. The people who say don’t judge can only respond that way **because they have already judged me!**

That’s right. They read what I said, decided (judged) it was judgmental, and then posted a comment telling me I shouldn’t judge. *They are judging me and telling me it’s wrong to judge at the same time!*

A little drink of hypocrisy anyone? Can you smell the bouquet of that fine hypocritical wine? I know I can.

So let’s just be honest here. You can’t criticize others other’s for judging without having judged them as being judgemental first. Let just admit that and then try and understand what Jesus was really saying. To use his words out of context and wrongly is at best disrespectful and at worst sinful. If you’re going to quote him the very least you can do is take the time to understand him first. Not just use the verse when it’s hand and ignore his teachings on other things that aren’t popular today and that you don’t like. Try and remember this the next time someone drops this verse on you like a bomb.

Death is the solution to all problems. No man - no problem.—Joseph Stalin

⁵ *You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.* Matthew 7:5 (ESV)

In the realm of judging Jesus goes out of his way to point us in the one direction that many of us don't want to go. Towards ourselves. As we've seen judgement by itself isn't bad and is in fact necessary for living. We all do it and that's fine—as long as it's done in the right way.

However, that right way is difficult to do. So instead of constantly looking at other people and their problems, Jesus has a better solution. Deal with your own issues before you try dealing with other peoples problems. If I'm not focused on you then I probably won't even be aware of what your problems are much less have time to condemn you for them.

Jesus used the ridiculous image of a man with a huge log growing out of one eye trying instruct another on how to get that tiny little speck out of their own eye. Just like those who judge while telling others not too, this is the height of hypocrisy.

Sadly it's not uncommon at all either. I know I've done it and I'll bet even money you have too. Almost everyone has so we can relate to what Jesus is saying here even as we laugh or smile at the picture he paints for us. Go ahead and laugh, there's nothing wrong with that. Jesus here is clearly injecting a bit of humor because, as the song says, a spoon full of sugar helps the medicine go down."

The medicine here is that I need to take care of my own issues before I volunteer to tell you what to do. I know lots of people who can teach boundaries to others but not apply them in their own lives. That's just one example of how often we are guilty of being blind to our own problems. **Lord, help me to see myself as I am and then do something about it!**

"Never go tapping into the lives of others like you know them and their story! Their story is not yours, tell yours, for that is all you know." — Auliq-Ice

³ *Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?*
- Matthew 7:3 (ESV)

Dealing with my own issues is just one form of minding my own business. This is something taught in the New Testament but not always understood very well. For example look at what Paul says to the Thessalonians ¹¹ *and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,* 1 Thessalonians 4:11 (ESV)

Many people have trouble with this because it seems a bit selfish. Shouldn't I be concerned about how the people I know are doing? How can I know what's up in your life if I'm not involved in it?

Yes, we are to be involved in others lives, that's called fellowship in the Bible. But we are not to be snooping around where we haven't been invited much less listening to the latest gossip about someone. If a person doesn't want help then the Christ-like thing to do is to honor their decision. Just look at how he responded when the rich young ruler walked away from him. He didn't ask him to come back or try to bargain with him. He let him go with a sad and broken heart.

We need to do the same. Until someone wants help I can't help them. I know a lot of people I'm very fond of who I know need help but aren't ready to receive it. So what do I do? I leave them alone that's what! That doesn't mean I don't interact with them, it means I don't nag them about their bad decision. They have a God given right to choose and God doesn't need my help to show them how wrong they are. I respect them enough to let them go, and trust God enough to believe that he's working to convict them of their sins through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That's what disciples do.

Week 5, Friday: Dogs, Pigs & Disaster!

Make somebody happy today. Mind your own business. -Ann Landers

⁶ *“Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. Matthew 7:6 (ESV)*

If you really want to tick someone off send them the verse above with a note that says, “Thinking of you” and watch what happens! But seriously why did Jesus put this verse right at the end of his teaching on judging? It doesn’t seem to fit and very often people don’t connect it to it’s context.

But when you think about it for a while you can see it’s a perfect fit. He’s just told us to mind our own business and to deal with our issues. Then he gives us the line about not throwing pearls before pigs. Translation: *If you try and help people who aren’t ready you aren’t just wasting your time, your making things worse!*

Pigs can appreciate pearls, dogs don’t know anything about what’s holy, but both can tear you up fast if you provoke them enough. Likewise trying to make people accept your help or your wise words and solutions to their problems is only going to make a bad situation even worse.

They are either going to reject you, hurt your feelings and damage the relationship. Or they’ll act like they are listening but all the while will be writing you off as a worthless busy body and someone to be avoided whenever possible. If you are always trying to help people, but they don’t change other than to stay away from you, well then this verse is probably for you.

I know it sucks—but you might want to go to the website and work your way our Boundaries Campaign because you clearly have problems making them work in your life. Jesus—who was God in the flesh remember—didn’t but into people’s lives or try and make them do what’s right. So why on earth do you think you should do so? **Trust God & repent!**

Week 5, Saturday: Getting Out of God’s Way

Enabling: Removing the natural consequences of someone’s behavior.—Codependency Recovery

² *For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.—Matthew 7:2 (ESV)*

So what’s the bottom line about all this? If I can’t judge people unfairly and I’m supposed to mind my own business then what on earth am I supposed to do? This is the kind of question lots of Christians ask, because lots of Christians have been taught poorly and end up thinking they are sent by God to rescue everyone.

Here’s the short answer: **Get out of God’s way already!**

All I’m doing by jumping in and softening the blow so that the ones I love don’t reap what they sow is this: *I’m getting in God’s way.* I’m also unconsciously playing God. All this casting of pearls and keeping strays from going to pound simply gets in the way of God working in their lives.

We see this a lot in our jail ministry. I don’t get there that often but often enough to note how even people in jail have folks on the outside doing their dead level best to shield them from the consequences of what they’ve done. Which is the worst possible thing you can do. In reality you aren’t helping but hurting, and you are stopping or slowing down the work of conviction that the Holy Spirit is attempting to do in their hearts.

We have to get the point where we love people enough to put them into God’s hands and let them work it out with Him. Really it’s that simple. We say we believe in an almighty, loving, compassionate God. But then when things don’t turn out the way we think they should we try and jump in and “fix” things. Please—just work on letting God fix you and don’t get in his way as he works on others himself.

Lord, help me to stay out of your way, work in my life and the lives of those I love to make us like Christ. Amen.



DEVOTIONAL

Week Six:

Don't Fall Down Go Boom

Week 6, Monday: If I Build It...

Predicting rain doesn't count. Building arks does.—Warren Buffett

²⁴ “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock...²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. Matthew 7:24,26 (ESV)

“If you build it they will come.” Most of us have heard the quote even if we haven’t seen the movie. (Yep, I haven’t seen it and don’t have any plans too—let the moaning begin!) I don’t want to argue about whether it’s true or not, but simply use it as an illustration that we are all building our lives on something.

The really sad thing is that most people don’t have any idea what their foundation in life is. But whether you know what it is or not, believe me it’s there. More on this tomorrow.

Today I want to challenge everyone to look at themselves as a builder because that’s what you are. Even people like me who aren’t good with tools at all are builders. We’re all building something alright. The question we ought to be answering is—*what am I building?*

The answer for far too many of us is—*I’m building a mess!*

A real building is built to a plan, even if that plan is only in the builder’s mind. It’s built carefully so that it doesn’t collapse under its own weight. It’s built for some kind of purpose too. Maybe it’s just a toolshed or a barn. Maybe it’s a huge house for someone rich. Whatever its purposes is it’s real and it’s important otherwise who would take the time, expense and labor to make it?

God wants to work with us to build our lives into something special for Him. Exactly what that is I can’t tell you. You have to figure that out before God and then cooperate with Him to build it strong and beautiful for him and his purposes. **May your life be a beautiful construct, a reflection of God’s Gospel of Grace, and a witness to everyone of it’s truth.**

Week 6, Tuesday: Everyone Builds on Something

Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty. The obedient must be slaves. - Henry David Thoreau

¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11 (ESV)

Yesterday we talked about the fact that whether we know it or not we are all builders. Of course that means that we’re all building our lives, our families and ourselves *on* something. Everyone has a set of foundational beliefs that serve as guides in this building program. But how many know what those foundational beliefs are? You might be surprised to know that most people really don’t have any idea.

We tend to just take things for granted. If you’ve heard something all your life very often you just assume that it’s true and natural and everyone believes it. As you get older you might be in for a shock when you find out that the world is full of people who have never heard or don’t agree with your foundation at all.

That’s why it’s critical to know what our foundation is, make sure it’s centered on Jesus and his Gospel, and to follow God’s plan carefully as we move through life. Paul says there’s really only one foundation and that’s Jesus. Jesus himself said that if you don’t believe and *do* his teachings then your foundation is built on sand and will fail you during the storms of life. I think Mr. Murphy was right when he added it’ll probably fail at the worst possible time.

How do we know what our foundation really is? It has to extend beyond me simply saying I’m building on Christ to me understanding the Gospel and its implications well enough to actually do it. That means I have to examine where Jesus calls me to be different from my culture, to avoid or confront cultural norms when they contradict the teachings of the Bible.

That’s neither easy nor popular, but it is what Christ calls all his disciples to do. This calls us back to making sure we’re aware of both the big and small things. It calls me to be committed to making Jesus Lord of *all my life*, every single part of it no matter how small or insignificant. Jesus needs to be Lord of All, and I should build in such a way to make that possible. **Lord help to make Christ & Christ alone the real foundation of my life. Amen.**

A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education. - Theodore Roosevelt

²⁵ *And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. Matthew 7:25 (ESV)*

The Bible has often been described as a rock through out church history and that makes perfect sense. God is often described in the Bible as our rock. ³² *"For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God? 2 Samuel 22:32 (ESV)* So it only makes sense that His Word, the revelation of his will, would be our rock as well. If Jesus is the Rock then what else could his word be?

Jesus says that if we're wise we'll build on the rock. That means we need to know our Bibles. To really know Scripture we have to go beyond just reading bits of pieces of it but to strive to understand it as a whole. To view Biblical teachings in context so that we can understand the deeper truths that people so often miss.

This will not make you popular. ⁶ *For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."* ⁷ *So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"* ⁸ *and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense."* 1 Peter 2:6-8a (ESV) The world rejected Jesus and his teachings and if you choose to follow him and them they will reject you as well.

In our culture the church coasted for decades, enjoying a large amount of acceptance, at least publicly. But now it's clear our culture is moving away from Christ's Gospel as rapidly as possible. More and more there is a price to pay for being a real disciple of Jesus. That cost will only increase over time regardless of who's elected to any office.

So we have a choice to make. Will I cling to the rock in the storms that are coming? Or will I choose another foundation? For real disciples that's a clear choice, one that, hopefully, we made when we first gave our lives to Christ. If we didn't then we'll have a real decision point on this issue arise soon enough. So just how important is God's Word to me? If I say I believe it am I reading, studying & meditating on it regularly? If it's my rock I will be for I cannot stand without it.

It is a dangerous and slippery slope upon which we stand when we reject what Solomon called the beginning of wisdom - the fear of God.- Ray Comfort

² *But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.* ³ *For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Psalm 73:2-3 (ESV)*

Sand is the opposite of rock when it comes to building. Obviously it's not exactly recommended as great way to build a firm and steady edifice. Strange how we all know that and yet so many of us are busy construction part of all of our lives on the most sandy ground imaginable.

I think most of us are actually doing a little of both at the same time. Part of our lives do reflect the Word of God and are built on the rock. But then there are certain areas where maybe the rock has turned to gravel and there might be a few places where it's just plain sand.

No one, I hope, would build a physical building that way, and building part or all of my life on sand is just as foolish. I know people who've done that and in the end pay a price for it. In my own life I've had more than one disaster because I thought I was on the rock when in reality I was just building a big old sand castle!

The temptation here is to go along with my culture or my upbringing or my education because *it sounds so good, it looks so good, and everyone else is doing it.* But according to Jesus that way leads us straight to disaster. To build on the rock means I have to make a series of choices. I must decide to follow Christ and now culture even when *it feels wrong to do so.* Going along with your friends or family often *feels good,* but if the direction that takes you is away from God and his Word then it's a *bad choice no matter how good it feels.*

We're surrounded by sand on all sides, it's up to us to correctly discern what's sand and what's rock and cling to the rock no matter what. It won't be easy. Jesus makes it pretty clear in the Sermon on the Mount that following him comes with a price, and sometimes it's a pretty high price indeed. But in the end it's worth all the pain and pressure to have my life standing on God's good and perfect Word, a light and example of just what God can do in one person's life.

Week 6, Friday: Fell Down Went BOOM!

The drops of rain make a hole in the stone, not by violence, but by oft falling. Lucretius

²⁷ *And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.* Matthew 7:27 (ESV)

“...and great was the fall of it.” Did you ever pay attention to that little phrase at the end of Jesus parable about the wise and foolish builder? He could have just said the house fell and made his point. But he didn’t. He added in that ominous phrase, “**great was the fall of it.**”

Remember that Jesus is finishing his sermon and summing it up here. He doesn’t do that as too many speakers and preachers do—giving us a quick over view of all his major points. No he tells us a little story, a parable, and makes one big point that he hopes no one will miss. To help make sure we get it that phrase is used.

What’s the point? If you don’t accept and do what the Sermon on the Mount teaches, not only will your life crash, but the fall will be great. It will be huge, disastrous collapse that destroys everything.

We’ve seen this before and will see it again. When a Pastor falls it’s a great fall because it doesn’t just affect him. When he goes he takes his wife and family and his church with him. When you seek to live for Christ but don’t build on the right foundation you *will* fall, it’s just a matter of time. And if you build big then your crash will be big as well.

How many people’s lives or faith were destroyed when some nationally known minister was exposed as a hypocrite? Only God knows that number but I can tell you that it was probably bigger than most of us think. When these things happen it’s like injecting acid into the hearts of people that silently eats away at their trust and can, in the end, cause them to drop off and fall away.

How tragic. Remember this really *isn’t about just you*. It’s about all the people who are watching you and influenced by you. You might not think that amounts to much but take my word for it; more people are watching you than you know. If you slip and fall you’re going to take a lot of people with you. So you see when people think or say, *It’s my life and I’ll do what I want*. They are lying. It’s *not* just your life, your life impacts the lives of many others. No one is an island after all. So build carefully because your choices will impact the lives of others. Let that be a good witness for Jesus our rock!

Week 6, Saturday: I Hear It So I Can DO IT!

My powers are ordinary. Only my application brings me success.—Isaac Newton

²⁴ *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. Matthew 7:24 (ESV)*

This is the last devotional for our **Radical** Spiritual Growth Campaign. So naturally we want to end on a high note. What I’m about to say here probably won’t be new to any of you. You’ve heard this before, from me and many others. But that doesn’t mean that you and I don’t need to hear it again. I know I do.

The point of the Sermon on the Mount is not to increase out knowledge as important as that is. It’s not to make you *feel* closer to God or anything else. It’s not to bring us to some enlightened, higher state of being where we float above it all and can be untouched by life’s problems. None of those are what Jesus is driving at and if you’ve been waiting for that to happen then I have to say that you’re waiting in vain.

He says *exactly* what he wants us to do in the verse quoted above. He wants us to *do what he just told to do*. Pretty simple right? I said simple *not* easy.

Now of course to do his Word I must know his Word, understand his Word and believe his Word is truth. So knowledge is vital but it’s only a means to an end. The end result isn’t for us to have heads packed with knowledge. The point here is to actually *start living the radical teachings of Jesus*.

I’m pretty sure that’s enough to keep you busy for an afternoon or two! How about a life time or two? Eternity?

Lord, as the campaign ends help me to move beyond mere knowledge as important as that is. Help me to be a doer. May I hunger to serve you and live like Christ as a starving man craves break. May I thirst to act out your love and forgiveness as someone lost in the desert yearns for water. May I always seek you Jesus. Amen



Small Group Discussion Guide

Group Host Guide Lines

Thank you so much for agreeing to host a small group for our **Boundaries: Liberation Thru Limits Campaign**. I know this is a step of faith for many of you and that you are a bit nervous. That's completely understandable and hopefully the few ideas I'll present here will help you.

First of all remember you are *not teaching* – I'll do that on the Video. All you have to do is ask the questions and guide the discussion after the video has stopped. A word on the videos – the DVD's we are providing should work just fine in your DVD or Blu-Ray player. However, please test them first to make sure. If they don't work and you have a computer you should be able to stream them off the church internet site – we'll announce more on that at church.

Snacks It's completely up to you and your group if you want to have snacks or not. If you do I recommend you keep them very simple, and rotate who brings them so no one person (especially you host or hostess) is overwhelmed.

Length of time. You should probably plan on most meeting going around 90 minutes and not let them go much past two hours even if people are enjoying themselves. We don't want to wear people out, but that's for you to determine as the discussion rolls along.

Topics. What we'll be doing in our groups this year is discussing the major different types or kinds of prayer. Louie will teach for about 10 minutes and then he and Amy will discuss what he's taught and the type of prayer under consideration. We're leaving you a bit more time than usual so that your group will actually have more time to **pray** since that's what we're trying to do this year.

The questions. As you can see I've provided you with an opening question to ask before the video and then several to talk about afterwards. Don't feel obligated to do all the questions if the group is really into one. You don't have to force them to complete them all.

Getting Off Topic. One of the most difficult things for people to handle is what to do when someone asks a question or makes a point that's completely off the topic under discussion. As host it's up to you to help steer things back on topic unless there's a real need to go off topic to help someone in the group at that moment.

Sometimes you'll have a person who does that regularly. Here's what I do. I'll say something like, "Thanks, that's a good point for us to discuss later but right now we are dealing with..." Or, "Well I don't know but let's get back to the question..." It's usually not hard to redirect the conversation and if you find someone who is regularly disruptive you might want to talk to them privately. You can call me for help on that one.

Prayer Time: You are free to pray as you wish. We hope you'll encourage everyone in the group to pray and to give them time for that without pressuring them to pray. In the back of this booklet there's some information on Conversational Prayer if you wish to try that. If not please use whatever form of group prayer seem to work best for your group.

Thanks again, God bless you! May you develop powerful Biblical Boundaries!

- Louie



Week One: Talk About Talk



Opening Prayer



Opening Question:

Why all this concern about our talk? How important do you think it is for a disciple of Jesus speech to be Christ like?



Notes on Video:

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. Matthew 5:21-26 (ESV)

1) You’ve heard it said...but I say...

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old... ²² But I say to you... Matthew 5:21-26 (ESV)

- The commandment refers to _____
- This is _____ an Old Testament Quote!

2) Anger is the _____

²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment... Matthew 5:21a (ESV)

²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. Ephesians 4:26-27 (ESV)

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.

¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.”

¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” John 2:13-17 (ESV)

• **How I speak really is _____**

²² *But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire... Matthew 5:22 (ESV)*

¹⁷ *You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? Matthew 23:17 (ESV)*

² *Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, Matthew 25:2-3 (ESV)*

²³ *Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. 2 Timothy 2:23 (ESV)*

• **How does anger murder?**

◇ **It _____ people.**

3) My speech must _____ to Christ.

³³ *“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil. Matthew 5:33-37 (ESV)*

• **Everything I say should be _____**

¹⁷ *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17 (ESV)*



Discussion Questions:

- 1) Why does Jesus focus so much on our speech? Is what we say and how we say it really that important? If so why?
- 2) How do you usually express your anger? What’s the first thing you do when you get angry?
- 3) Is Mr. T going to hell for always saying, “I pity the fool!!” Why or why not?
- 4) Why do we always like to put labels on people we disagree with? Does this tend to dehumanize them and why is that a bad thing?
- 5) How can my speech reflect my being a disciple of Jesus?
- 6) If everything I say and do is supposed to be in the Name of Jesus, does that include *everything*, like going to the bathroom, making love to my spouse, etc.?



Prayer Time



Week Two: Sex & Lust



Opening Prayer



Opening Question:

In this age of sexual freedom why are so many people still uneasy about discussing sex?



Notes on Video:

1) Like it or not, this does apply to ME AND EVERYONE ELSE.

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I say to you that every-one who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5: 27-32 (ESV)

- It's the _____ that counts!

- What Is Lust?
 - ◇ Lust is NOT: _____
 - ◇ Lust IS: _____
 - ◇ Misusing God's gift of _____

- I need to learn how to think about sex from a _____

- For Single People
 - ◇ Don't get _____
 - ◇ Pray and _____

For Married People

- Bring the Bible Into the _____

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Mark 8:34 (ESV)

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)

³ The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. ⁵ Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 (NIV)

2) When you shouldn't take commands_____

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. Matthew 5:29-3- (ESV)

So What's It Mean?

- We must behave as if we really couldn't see or touch.

Some Practical Advice.

- Recognize Lust when you see, hear or feel it.
- Use the brains God gave you
- Accept sexuality as a wonderful gift, and learn to live with it



Discussion Questions:

- 1)) If it's the thought that counts should we all wear blindfolds and live alone in a cave? Is this standard Jesus sets up here realistic and achievable? Why or why not?
- 2) Do you agree with the definition of lust given in the lesson? How would you define lust? How big of a problem is lust today?
- 3) If you are single and there are single people in your group – what do you think of what was said in the lesson about how to deal with it? How does being in a group and having friends help you deal with sexual temptation?
- 4) For the married people in the group – what do you think about “bringing the Bible into the bedroom?” Is that possible?
- 5) Why did Jesus say to tear out your eyeball if he didn't mean it? Why use such extreme language?
- 6) Why does God care about sex at all?



Prayer Time



Week Three—The Model Prayer



Opening Prayer



Opening Question:

If prayer is just “talking to God” then why would we need a model prayer? Can’t I just say whatever I want?



Notes on Video:

1) Don’t pray like a _____

⁷ “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Matthew 6: 7-8

2) Christ’s Model for a Disciple’s Prayer

⁹ Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Matthew 6:7-13 (ESV)

- A disciple’s prayer is _____

⁹ Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6: 9-10

◇ His _____

◇ His _____

◇ His _____

- A disciples prayer is concerned with _____

.¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Matthew 6:11-13 (ESV)

◇ Give Us Our _____

◇ _____ Every Day.

◇ Daily _____ From Evil.

Bottom Line—These three topics cover all human need.

- _____ - daily bread
- _____ - forgiveness
- _____ - deliverance from evil



Discussion Questions:

- 1) Do you think “the Lord’s Prayer” should be repeated by Christians or is that violating Jesus command about babbling?
- 2) Why do people often find it difficult to keep their prayers God centered? Is that a problem you have? How do you deal with it?
- 3) Since God is already perfect and holy what’s the point of saying, “Hallowed be your name?” Does my saying that make it more holy? If not then why say it?
- 4) Is it helpful to pray for His will to be done if I don’t know what His will is? Why say that if you aren’t sure what He might want to do with you?
- 5) What kind of things do you think are included in the phrase “daily bread?”
- 6) Jesus includes forgiveness in this prayer. How often do you ask God to forgive you? Why is this important to you if it is?
- 7) Why do I have to ask God to deliver me from evil? Shouldn’t he be doing that automatically? What part does my free will play in this?
- 8) Since the phrase “Yours in the Kingdom...” isn’t found in the best ancient Greek manuscripts of Matthew should we leave that part out? How does leaving it out make you feel?



Prayer Time



Week Four: Fasting, Treasure, Two Masters



Opening Prayer



Opening Question:

How hard is it to keep Jesus as your one and only Master? What things in your life seek to dethrone Him as Lord of your life?



Notes on Video:

1) Spiritual Disciplines should be God centered not _____:

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6: 16-18

- Note the word “_____”
- Don’t worry about what anyone but _____ thinks about it.
- Jesus promises God will _____ for being faithful.

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. Galatians 6:9

2) What I value should be _____ more than material.

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! Matthew 6: 19-23 (ESV)

- It’s not about treasure, it’s about _____.

- Treasure in heaven helps me stay _____
- If the only light I have is darkness then I am _____

3) I am only capable of serving _____

²⁴ *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Matthew 6:16-24 (ESV)*

⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. Proverbs 3:5-7 (ESV)*

- You can't serve God and without practicing _____

⁵ *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Colossians 3:5 (NIV)*



Discussion Questions:

- 1) Fasting? Seriously? When was the last time you fasted for spiritual reasons (diets not included)?
- 2) The three major “spiritual disciplines” most Christians practice are prayer, Bible reading/study and worship attendance. How about others? Why isn't fasting or meditating upon Scripture a regular part of most of our lives?
- 3) What can I do to “lay up treasure in heaven?”
- 4) Is this doing good deeds to either earn salvation or cool rewards in heaven?
- 5) How can you tell what's most important to you? What evidence should I look for if I want to know whether earthly or heavenly treasure is my main desire and concern?
- 6) Jesus says “where your treasure there your heart will be also.” Using that standard where do you think most Americans hearts are? American Christians hearts are? Where's your heart?
- 7) Since I can only serve one master at a time is it ok to serve money 5 days a week, then switch to Jesus on the weekend and then switch back to money again on Monday? Why not?
- 8) Hey Kids—how about we schedule a group fast??



Prayer Time



Week Five: Asking, Seeking, Knocking



Opening Prayer



Opening Question:

Why do people always tell you to be careful for what you ask for? When was the last time you knocked on a door and regretted it?



Notes on Video:

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” Matthew 7:7-8

1) Asking is about _____ and _____ your needs and desires to God.

“You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” James 4:2-3

2) God knows what we need before we ask, but asking puts us in a position of _____ God’s role in our circumstances.

3) Seeking attaches _____ and _____ to our asking. Seeking doesn’t stop with asking, but diligently looking for the answer.

“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.” Proverbs 25:2

4) Knocking is a physical act, and it attaches _____ to our seeking and asking. It means giving God something to work with!

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Acts 16:6-10

5) Knocking implies _____

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

⁴ “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

⁶ And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:1-8

6) In every circumstance, whether asking, seeking, or knocking, the point is that God should be part of the _____



Discussion Questions:

- 1) Do you feel like you are currently in a season of asking, seeking, or knocking? How do you know?
- 2) Why do you think God expects us to employ different methods in prayer?
- 3) Share a time when you feel God hid something for you instead of from you.
- 4) What has been your response in the past when God is silent?
- 5) What have you been persevering in prayer for? How do you keep from losing hope?
- 6) Do you agree that we are not big enough to foil God’s plans? That he has bumpers up in our bowling lane? Why or why not?



Prayer Time



Week Six: The Narrow Way



Opening Prayer



Opening Question:

Does it make you feel uncomfortable to be called or known as someone who is narrow minded? Is that bad and so why is it bad to be narrow minded?



Notes on Video:

1) This is as _____ as you can get.

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Matthew 7:13-14 (ESV)

2) There are only _____ to choose from.

- The _____ Gate
- The _____ Gate

⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Psalm 1:6 (ESV)

¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (ESV)

3) Two Choices to Make...

- _____
- _____



Discussion Questions:

- 1) Does believing in and following the Narrow Way make me narrow minded? Why or why not? Why is being narrow minded bad anyway?
- 2) The Bible consistently gives us two, and only two, choices. You either follow God or you don't. Does this bother you? What about sincere people in other faiths? Why can't there be more than two choices?
- 3) Perhaps even harder than only having two gates is the fact Jesus says "few" will find the narrow gate. How can a loving God condemn the many? How few is few and why are you sure you're part of the "in crowd?"
- 4) Do you see parallels between choosing between life and death and other important choices you've made in your life? If so share those choices.
- 5) Since this concept is offensive to many people today in our culture how would you explain it to someone who isn't a Christian? Is there any way to be faithful to Jesus teachings yet explain this in a way that's more palatable?
- 6) Do you think we tend to avoid this when we talk to others about following Jesus? Should we be up front with it or wait and tell them "when they're ready" to hear it? Why or why not?
- 7) If you choose the wide, easy way instead of Jesus, who are you really following and how do you know that?



Prayer Time:



Week Seven: How To Apply & Live This Out



Opening Prayer



Opening Question:

Why do you think Jesus shifts from being very direct in most of the sermon to using a metaphor as he brings it to a close?



Notes on Video:

²⁴ “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV)

1) Disciples of Jesus will face _____ in their lives.

2) Surviving these storms depends on having a _____

- What are the shifting sands Jesus says not to build upon?

◇ _____

◇ Christianity that’s not completely _____

◇ What makes me _____

3) If you fall you will take _____



Discussion Questions:

- 1) Jesus speaks of rain and floods. Clearly this represents trials and tribulations in our lives. What trials in your past has God brought you through and how did He do it?**
- 2) What trials are you going through now and how's your foundation holding up? What can the group do to help you?**
- 3) How do you know if your foundation is really built on Christ? Is there another way than waiting around to see if you survive the next storm?**
- 4) What do you think foundation most people in our culture build their lives on? Why do they do it and how can we help them see that they are in danger?**
- 5) Jesus said "great" was the fall of the house built on sand. Have you ever seen a Christian fall and their faith be destroyed? What impact did that have on the people around them? What impact did it have on you?**
- 6) Looking back over all the lessons, devotionals and sermons you heard in our 40 Days Radical Campaign, which ones had the most impact on you? Why did these particular truths touch you so?**
- 7) What can you as an individual do to help you continue to follow Jesus in the Radical way he's called us too? How can this group do the same?**



Prayer Time: