

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW



IN THE KINGDOM OF JESUS

LIFEGROUP **STUDY GUIDE**

April 16 - May 21



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LIFEGROUP STUDY GUIDE

by Dan Franklin

This study guide follows along with LBF Church's current Sunday message series and is intended to be a supplement in your daily passionate pursuit of Jesus.

- *Watch last Sunday's message video:*
www.lbf.church/messages

Is your group stumped? Did you come to a question that you feel needs clarification? Our church isn't too big. Contact Pastor Dan with your questions.

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FINDING BLESSINGS IN STRANGE PLACES

Lesson 1 • April 16

MAIN POINT

In Jesus' kingdom, we value what the world despises.

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 5-7 is typically called "The Sermon on the Mount." It is the longest and most well-known sermon that we have recorded from Jesus. In the sermon, Jesus lays out his kingdom values. In other words, he describes what life looks like if we treat Jesus as King of our lives and our world.

In this first passage Jesus gives what we know as The Beatitudes. Nine times he starts a statement with the word, "Blessed." He is announcing what kinds of people are going to experience God's blessing in his kingdom. What we find, though, is that the people who are blessed in Jesus' kingdom are often not the same people who experience privilege in our current world system.

GETTING STARTED

1. If you were giving someone a roadmap to success in current American culture, what are five qualities that you would tell them to cultivate?

2. Name one way that following Jesus makes it harder to get ahead in American culture?

DIGGING IN

Read Matthew 5:1-12.

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, **2** and he began to teach them.

He said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

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

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. **12** Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. What common thread do you see between the different kinds of people that Jesus calls “blessed”?

5. Which beatitude most stands out to you, and why?

6. With each beatitude, Jesus promises a reward. What observations do you have about the rewards that are promised?

7. There are no commands in these verses. What, if anything, do you think Jesus expects his hearers to do in response to this section of his sermon?

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. If we are meant to cultivate the character qualities in this passage, how is our faith in Jesus central to this cultivation?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. Which beatitude in this passage doesn't currently describe you as much as you would like for it to? How would your life look different if this quality was typical of you?

11. What is holding you back from looking more like Jesus' description of his kingdom people in this passage?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. Why do you think God doesn't just instantly reward the attitudes and actions that he values the most? Why does he make us wait for rewards?

DON'T STOP THE SPREAD

Lesson 2 • April 23

MAIN POINT

In Jesus' kingdom, we spread the light of the King.

INTRODUCTION

During the COVID shutdown, we constantly heard the phrase "stop the spread." The idea was for us to keep to ourselves, especially if we might have COVID and therefore have the possibility of being contagious to others.

In this passage, Jesus calls us not to stop a spread, but to embrace the identity of those who spread the light of Jesus near and far. For those of us who have received Christ's grace, we want to be contagious to as many people as possible.

Then Jesus makes a statement about his purpose and his identity that backs up his call for us to spread his light. After all, if he is going to be the center of our message, he better be someone important enough to justify that level of centrality. And he is. He revealed that he has come not only in order to fulfill some individual prophecies, but to fulfill all that was written beforehand.

GETTING STARTED

1. Name some ways that light is helpful.

2. What do you think is the difference between spreading Christian ideas and spreading the message of Christ?

DIGGING IN

Read Matthew 5:13-20.

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

14 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. **18** For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. **19** Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. Jesus does not command his disciples to be salt and light. He says that they are salt and light. With that said, what action steps do you think he expects his disciples to take in light of this identity?

5. In John 8:12 Jesus says that he is the light of the world. How do you think that statement impacts his words here that his followers are the light of the world?

6. According to Jesus, what is the ultimate result of us letting our light shine?

7. What do you think Jesus means when he says that he came to fulfill the law and the prophets?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. Because of Jesus, there are certain Old Testament regulations that we are no longer required to follow. What do you think is the difference between not following these regulations because Jesus abolished them and not following them because Jesus fulfilled them?

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. We read in 1 John 1:5 that God is light. How is God's light necessary to lead us to salvation in Jesus?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. In what ways has God set you up to spread the light of Jesus to those around you?

11. Are there any ways that you have slipped into trusting "Christian principles" more than trusting Christ personally? If so, how can you put your full trust in Christ?

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Lesson 3 • April 30

MAIN POINT

In Jesus' kingdom, we deal with heart issues.

INTRODUCTION

How long do you think it is possible for a person to behave outwardly in a way that is at odds with their inward reality? An hour? A day? A week? A month? A lifetime? We all know people who have a public persona that is pretty different from their inner reality. But how long do you think we can keep up the charade before the truth comes out?

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus confronts us on our inner reality. As opposed to being satisfied with telling us not to murder, he deals with our hatred and our anger. And instead of being satisfied with us avoiding adultery, he deals with the lust in our hearts.

At first glance this passage could seem crushing. We all fall short under the weight of Jesus' calling for us here. But Jesus' intention is not to crush us with burdens. Instead his intention is to paint a picture of what it looks like for us not only to adjust our outward behavior, but for us to experience inward transformation.

GETTING STARTED

1. In what situations do you find it most difficult to control your instinctive responses?

2. When do you think a thought becomes sinful? When it first crosses your mind? When you decide to dwell on it? When you decide to act on it? Or some other explanation?

DIGGING IN

Read Matthew 5:21-30.

21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister, will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. After reading verses 21-22 you might conclude that Jesus is condemning spontaneous feelings of anger. However, after reading his instructions in verses 23-24, what kind of anger and hatred do you think he is speaking out against?

5. Focus on verses 23-26. What situation today might be a parallel for the examples Jesus uses in these verses?

6. What do you think is the distinction between a man noticing an attractive woman and looking at her lustfully?

7. What do you think are some practical applications of Jesus' extreme instructions in verses 29-30?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. To what degree do you believe we are responsible for our instinctive responses of anger and lust?

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34, which is a prophecy about the new covenant that Jesus came to bring about (Luke 22:20). How do you see this prophecy relating to Jesus' words in Matthew 5:21-30?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. Take a moment to consider your heart attitude toward others. In what ways do you long to see God bring inside-out transformation in your life? Pray for yourself and your group in light of your answer.

11. What action can you take to cut yourself off from certain temptations (Matthew 5:29-30), in order to take seriously Jesus' call on your life?

PROMISE KEEPERS

Lesson 4 • May 7

MAIN POINT

In Jesus' kingdom, we keep our promises

INTRODUCTION

"But you promised!" We all have probably spoken these words to someone when they went back on their word to us. And we all have probably heard these words spoken to us when we went back on our word to someone else (or when they thought we went back on our word). These words are rarely spoken casually. They are normally spoken with great hurt and anger. To be on the wrong end of a broken promise feels like a deep betrayal.

In this passage Jesus speaks to us about our tendency to find ways to get out of the promises we have made. We do this in cases of divorce, and we do this in a variety of other ways as well. Few of us break our promises and then say, "Well, I broke my promise." Most of us decide that there was some justifiable reason why our promises should no longer apply. That line of thinking will be questioned by Jesus.

And lurking behind all of this talk of promise-keeping is the reality that if we are going to spread the light of Jesus, our behavior toward our promises must direct people's attention to how he keeps his promises.

GETTING STARTED

1. What are some negative results that can take place when someone doesn't keep their promises?

2. In what situations do you find it hardest to keep your promises?

DIGGING IN

Read Matthew 5:31-37.

31 "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' **32** But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' **34** But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; **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 swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. **37** All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. What do you think connects the two sections in this passage: (1) Verses 31-32 address divorce and (2) Verses 33-37 address oaths?

5. Many times we get focused on Jesus' exception to divorce in verse 32: "except for sexual immorality." But what is the big point Jesus is making in verses 31-32?

6. As you read what Jesus says in verses 33-37, what seems to be an excuse that people were using in order to break their word?

7. What is Jesus' ultimate solution to the question of swearing and oaths?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. Do you think some promises are more important than others, or do you think that all promises are equal? Explain your answer.

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. What would happen to your hope in Christ if you found out that he did not always keep his promises?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. Is there any person to whom you have not been faithful to keep promises? If so, how do you think God is calling you to repent both to him and to that person?

11. Take in the reality that God has always kept his promises to you. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving to him and of commitment to him in response.

STEPPING IT UP

Lesson 5 • May 14

MAIN POINT

In Jesus' kingdom, we leave revenge to God.

INTRODUCTION

In this passage Jesus twice calls his followers to step things up. This is ironic because he begins by calling us not to step things up in the way we might want to.

We all have times when someone mistreats us, and we are tempted to get revenge by stepping up our retaliation. We don't simply want to return an insult for an insult; we want our insult to be more crushing than theirs. We don't simply want to hurt them in the way they hurt us; we want their hurt to be way worse. This is our instinct when we are wronged.

Jesus not only calls us away from escalations, he steps it up further. He calls us to bless and love and pray for those who are mistreating us. And in this passage, he not only gives us instructions with regard to this. He also gives us a compelling reason why we should follow his instructions.

GETTING STARTED

1. When was the last time you were seriously tempted to take revenge in some form?

2. Who are some people—or categories of people—who are really difficult for you to love?

DIGGING IN

Read Matthew 5:38-48.

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ **39** But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. **40** And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. **41** If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. **42** Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. **46** If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? **47** And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. What thematic connection do you see between verses 38-42 and verses 43-48? Summarize the connection in one sentence.

5. The law that stated, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth,” was meant to stop people from escalating when it came to revenge. For example, you couldn’t injure two eyes for your one injured eye. How, though, does Jesus take this command to the next level in verses 38-42?

6. Who might be some “enemies” that you could encounter in your life right now?

7. According to verses 45 and 48, how is our attitude toward our enemies meant to parallel God’s attitude toward his enemies?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. How do these verses (especially verses 39-42) relate to the popular idea of boundaries? Are the two ideas in conflict with one another? Explain your answer.

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. Read Romans 12:19-21. In this passage, how does Paul guide us as to why we should hold back on taking our own revenge?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. In what ways has God been kind to you, despite the fact that you haven’t deserved it?

11. What are some specific ways that you can pray for those who are difficult for you to love?

KINGDOM GIVING

Lesson 6 • May 21

MAIN POINT

In Jesus' kingdom, we trust in God's reward.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been frustrated because you didn't get credit for something you did? I have. I've been frustrated over not getting credit for things I've said, things I've done, advice I've given, and even jokes I've told. It can be infuriating when we don't get credit for good things that we've done.

We need to be warned, though. Our desire to get credit for what we have done can undermine the way that Jesus is calling us to live. Our determination to have other people (a) see and (b) affirm our actions, can lead to us acting out of the wrong kind of heart. Even more importantly, it can cause us to miss out on the reward that God wants to give us.

In Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus gives three examples of how we "practice" our "righteousness." He talks about giving, praying, and fasting. In this first section, he talks about how we can undermine the goodness of our generous giving if we do it, just to be noticed by others. While this warning may make sense to us, what is truly amazing is that Jesus' solution is most likely not what we would expect.

GETTING STARTED

1. Is it selfish to obey God out of a desire to be rewarded by him? Why or why not?

2. What obstacles keep you from giving more generously to people who are in need?

DIGGING IN

Read Matthew 6:1-4.

1 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. What does verse 1 say about what our motives should be and shouldn't be for practicing "righteousness"?

5. What do you conclude from the fact that Jesus twice says, “When you give to the needy”?

6. What might be a modern parallel to what Jesus describes in verse 2 (giving with trumpets and announcements)?

7. According to Jesus, why should we give in secret, instead of proclaiming our giving for all to see?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. Do you think there is ever an appropriate time to share with someone else about how you practice generous giving? If so, give an example.

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-11. How does this passage speak to giving as a response to God’s goodness, as opposed to trying to earn his favor?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. What are some ways that you have experienced God’s reward in your life through your faithfulness in giving?

11. In light of Jesus’ teaching in this passage, what practical step can you take to adjust your attitude and your actions when it comes to giving to those in need?