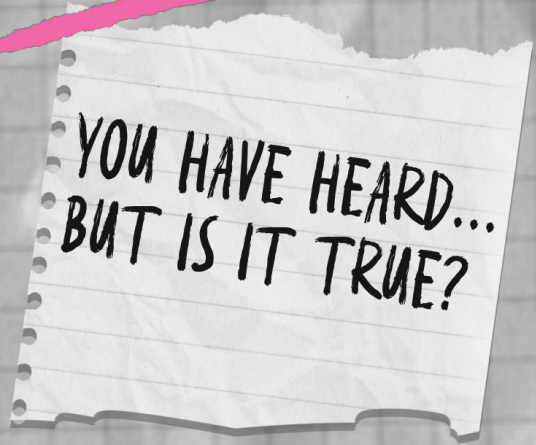





SCRIPTING

the flip



YOU HAVE HEARD...
BUT IS IT TRUE?

A Special Thanks

The pulling together of these journals is a team effort. We would love to give a special thanks to all of our writers! As well to our editors: Mike Allen, Anita Neilson, Bill Boyce, Curt Nelson, Heather Dody, and Tricia Tucker. Thank you for making these journals happen!

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"SCRIPTING THE FLIP"

About This Journal

Here at NWH, our mission is to **Love Jesus, Live Like Jesus, and Make Him Known.**

In this journal, we want to invite you to go deeper into your **love of Christ.** As a church, we do this by **committing to Sundays** and by **practicing the spiritual disciplines**, which are practices found in the Bible, that help promote spiritual growth in the Christian's life.

These practices become the rhythms of our lives and include prayer, silence and solitude, sabbath, fasting, Bible reading and meditation, celebration, and more. These are not a means to salvation, which is a free gift from God, but they help attune our hearts to His in our daily lives.

In the following pages, we hope you will find some helpful tools to practice some of these disciplines: Bible reading and meditation and prayer. We want to encourage you to engage deeply with the Scriptures, fostering a more rich and close relationship with God.

Each week you will find the following:

A space for sermon notes:

Our first ask for you is to **Commit to Sundays!** Take notes on the messages. Feel free to ask the pastors or a spiritually mature friend any questions you might have that arise from the message. If you miss any of the messages, you can watch them online. Let the Word of God do its good and intended work of transformation in you.

A space to Script Your Flip:

Each week, you will have time at the end of the sermon to do some “scripting”. What are you tempted to believe that isn’t true? What do you need to believe that is true? Write it out. During the week, take time to revisit your script and engage with it further.

A reflection on the passage from a member of our church:

We have included these journal entries to help you continue to reflect on the passage throughout the week. We also encourage you to **dive into the text, read it for yourself, reflect on it, and think deeply about it.**

A section for prayer and meditation:

In this journal, we have included a space to walk through a **Lectio Divina** on the passage: an ancient practice of scriptural reading, meditation, and prayer. To become acquainted with how to do this practice, turn to page 10.

A section with two options for memorization:

Option A focuses on a key verse in the text.

Option B encourages the memorization of the entire Sermon on the Mount. *

**You should know, Pastor Ron, is offering his company and dinner out to anyone who memorizes these three chapters!*

See page 269 for the full passage!

Tips for How to Study the Bible

Hermeneutics is the process in which we study and interpret God's word. The beauty of the Bible is that it is living and active which means that you will never stop learning from it! God has so much to teach us through His word - who He is, who we are, and about the world we live in.

The journey of studying the Bible is a lifelong journey and it begins with a personal commitment to open it up and read. In this series we encourage you to dive deep into the text. Keep a notebook or this journal with you and make notes of things that stick out to you and things that you want to study more. Then take time to process what you are learning! Ask questions! Stay hungry! Find someone to read it with you! We are all on this journey together.

TIP #1: GET YOUR HANDS ON A GOOD STUDY BIBLE

If you look up Bibles for sale online or even go to a local bookstore, you will find yourself with many options to choose from. There are many translations, and they all come with varying levels of tools to help you study the Bible. It can range from nothing but verses (sometimes even without verse numbers) to what feels like full concordances included! We would highly recommend an ESV translation (that is what we use at church on Sundays), specifically a study Bible. Study Bibles include charts, maps, cross-references, study notes, and more to help you journey through the Bible. Crossway's website is a great resource to find a Bible that works for you. We also have several ESV Study Bibles for sale in the lobby resource library at NWH. So, find a great study Bible and start reading!

TIP #2: UTILIZE YOUR BIBLE'S FOOTNOTES, CROSS-REFERENCES, AND COMMENTARY

When David wrote many of the Psalms or when Moses wrote the Pentateuch, they didn't include the little numbers and notes you may have included in your Bible. Those came much later as scholars and Bible translators connected the dots throughout the Bible and shared explanations for cultural references and word meanings. Although these notes are not inspired by God, they can be very helpful in understanding the text and also seeing the overarching story in the Bible. It's amazing how much of the Bible connects with itself. These footnotes and cross-references can become a deep pool to dive into as you study.

Check out the front of your Bible as there is usually a short explanation of how to use these notes. Oftentimes, small numbers (for example: ²) will reference a footnote found at the bottom of the page which provides more information on that particular part of the text. Cross-references are usually marked by small letters (for example: ^a) and will be listed with the verse number and other verse references throughout the Bible that connect with the particular word or verse. Each Bible publisher may have a different way of displaying these notes but the general rules and usages are consistent.

Another helpful tool available in a study Bible is commentary at the bottom of each page sharing explanations made by Bible scholars. Again, these are not infallible or inspired by God but the men and women who have studied these ancient texts, using excellent hermeneutics and historical accounts, have insight that we would not know directly at times, especially related to the culture of the day.

With all of these, as we will cover in Tip #3, use them as a secondary resource. Begin first with just reading the text and seeing what you pull out on your own. This helps stretch your Bible study muscles. Then, go back to these notes for additional information and help.

TIP #3: THE 6 P's OF SOUND BIBLE STUDY

This content is adapted from *Women of the Word: How to study the Bible with Both Our Hearts and Our Minds* by Jen Wilkin.

Ask yourself these questions as you read and study God's word!

1. **PURPOSE**

How does this text fit into the bigger narrative of the Bible?

2. **PERSPECTIVE**

What is the framework for this text? Who wrote it? When was it written? To whom was it written? In what style was it written? Why was it written?

3. **PATIENCE**

Don't immediately run to secondary sources, but spend some time critically thinking about the text, asking questions, and noting cross-references. What words in the passage stand out to you? Do you see any repetition?

4. **PROCESS**

Comprehension: What does it say?

Interpretation: What does it mean?

Application: How should it change me?

5. **PRAYER**

Praise: Begin with praising God for giving us His word! Praise Him for what the text showcases about the characteristics of God.

Admit: Share any questions, insecurities, or weaknesses that you've experienced during your study.

Request: Ask God to give you ears to hear and a heart that desires to be changed by His word.

Thank: Thank Him for revealing Himself, being in relationship with us, and allowing us to know Him, personally.

6. PEOPLE

Identify people with whom you can share what you've learned and also hear what God is teaching them in their study.

TIP #4: CHECK OUT "HOW TO READ THE BIBLE" VIDEO SERIES

The BibleProject is a non-profit organization that works incredibly hard to provide practical, free resources for individuals to connect with God's word! Through articles, videos, podcasts, and even classes the BibleProject is another great secondary resource on your Bible study journey.

Check it out here:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/how-to-read-the-bible/>



How to practice Lectio Divina

What is Lectio Divina?

Lectio Divina is an ancient practice, dating back to the early church. It is a type of meditative prayer in which we slow down, savor the text, listen for God's voice in it, let Him change us through it, prayer, and rest in the joy of our relationship with Him.

When and where should I do Lectio Divina?

Generally, a quiet time and space, where you can slow down and focus. For many, this time is best in the early hours of the morning before the rest of the family is awake. For some this could be a specific time set aside in the middle of the day once a week. For others, this could be in the evening after the business of the day. We encourage you to intentionally create a time and space for this in your week.

There are 5 steps to this ancient practice, which you will find outlined in each week:

Step 1: Prepare

Step 2: Lectio (5-10 minutes)

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

More Resources

For more background on the Sermon on the Mount, see this article by Ligonier Ministries:

<https://www.ligonier.org/guides/the-sermon-on-the-mount>



or take a look at this book:

“Living Inside Out and Upside Down: A Journey Through the Sermon on the Mount” by Rich Hagenbaugh

www.amazon.com/s?k=living+inside+out+and+upside+down&crd=14JNT56BP7LL9&srefix=living+inside+out+and+upside+do%2Caps%2C178&ref=nb_sb_noss



Introduction to “Scripting the Flip”

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Flipping the Script”? It’s a catchy way to point to a reversal of a narrative or situation, usually in a surprising way. It can be used to provoke thought, to challenge norms, and to inspire change. Sometimes it is used for good. Think of ordinary women advertising beauty products instead of ultra-groomed supermodels, flipping the script that you need to look a certain prescribed way. Sometimes it can be harmful, as in movies or plays like *Maleficent* or *Wicked*, where we see villains turned into sympathetic characters, flipping the script to suggest that being evil is really not so bad.

The ultimate flip of the script came in the Garden of Eden. This flip would go out into all the earth, for all time, affecting every human being to ever be in existence. Follow along with me as we go back to the beginning.

To have a flip, we first must have an original script. God’s original script for humankind, which was given at our creation, was one that was lifegiving, beautiful, purposeful and pure. It was a script of ultimate human flourishing, derived from living as we were created, whole and in close relationship with the Creator. It went like this:

“The good, abundant life is only found in being
A PART OF God’s kingdom”.

But the flip came when the Enemy spoke to Eve and trapped her with a lie. He is incredibly effective at what he does and is not called “the father of lies” without reason. He studies us and finds ways to twist our perception of reality, planting seeds of doubt about the goodness of our God. Satan’s promise to Eve was, “God is keeping you back from something great. He doesn’t want you to be like Him. If you follow MY WAY of life, you will TRULY have ultimate satisfaction. If you follow MY WAY, you will find so much more”. We could write out Satan’s creed like this:

“The good, abundant life is only found in being
APART FROM God’s kingdom”.

Sadly, Eve believed this flipped script and acted according to it. As a result, the world - including all of humankind - was broken. It is undeniable as we look at history from that point on. The secular world has continued to live out the Enemy’s flip, and instead of moving humankind to human flourishing (as the Enemy promised), it has moved us to ultimate emptiness, despair, and worthlessness (as the Enemy intended).

Same Old Story

We still live with this flipped script today. We hear the exact same lie, “YOU get to decide for yourselves what the good life is. YOU get to create your truth and write your own script. YOU get to decide what love is, what identity is, what family is. YOU get to decide what justice is, what community is, how we can save humanity, or if you even need to be saved at all. Come on up to the buffet and choose what looks and smells good to you. Create yourself and your world into what you want it to be”.

Bumper stickers, articles, books, and podcasts proclaim “You are enough”, “Live your truth, and “You do you”. These sayings sound great and are promoted as freedom, but really this worldview is flawed and comes with extreme pressure. It assumes that we humans have a divine amount of power and wisdom, not to mention perfect discernment. If it is really adhered to, this worldview does not result in freedom and does not result in the good life. Instead:

- It leads to personal selfishness and self-absorption, think spending endless time on social media curating the fake perfect image or trying to “discover” who you are.
- It can lead to a hardness of heart, as the focus turns so inward that all other concerns of people and the world are considered secondary.

- It leads to broken families, as in a wife and mom leaving her family to fulfill her longing to be her single and uninhibited “authentic self”.
- It leads to insecurity, as the feeling of who that “authentic self” is could change over time, influenced by a person’s emotions or other voices, leading to the constant creating and recreating of the self.
- It can lead to an unhealthy balance of self-care, as a person tries to develop their identity into who they want to be, perhaps becoming so preoccupied with it that it dominates all daily life, to the neglect of other, more important pursuits.

This worldview is trying to fill a hole that is impossible to fill apart from our original created purpose. Because you see, Satan is not Creator. His way isn’t working, and he never intended it to. The only way that truly works comes from God, the Creator Himself, whose voice alone can eclipse all other voices and answers.

Jesus flipped the script back when He came to earth, bringing the good life with Him. He did what only He could do to give us real life in His death and resurrection, and He told us how to live. Rather than the good life being found in everything that is APART FROM God’s kingdom, Jesus said the reality is that the good, abundant life is only found in being A PART OF God’s kingdom.

Even though we look forward to Christ’s return, when He will completely eradicate all evil and sin and the Enemy will be locked away for good, we do not have to wait until then to start living the good, abundant life. It is offered to us now.

So, this year at Northwest Hills, we are “Scripting the Flip”.

We are going to look closely at the claims made by our culture and its rewritten definitions of things like love, family, justice, and salvation.

We will see what Jesus has to say about these things, based on the word of the One who created us all. We will plan out how we will respond to “flip” things back to the original script, to point ourselves and others to true abundant life and to real human flourishing. We are going to “script” the “flip”.

This year we are in Christ’s famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded by the disciple Matthew who knew Jesus and heard these words in person. As in our secular world today, the Israelites in Christ’s day were trying to figure out how to enter the good life, or God’s kingdom, but were going about it the wrong way. Each group of Israelites at this time (and there were several) had a different idea on how to usher in the kingdom of God:

- The Pharisees, who held to a strict observance of the Jewish law, believed that God’s kingdom would come if you strictly adhered to every detail of it, both the written law and the oral man-made traditions.
- The Sadducees, who adhered to the written law, but rejected the use of the oral law, were often wealthy and powerful members of the Jewish aristocracy. They believed that God’s kingdom would come if you would just cooperate more with Rome.
- The Zealots had a radical passion for religious purity and adherence to the written law. They viewed obeying Roman rule as idolatry and betrayal to God, believing God’s kingdom would come in fighting for freedom from Rome, and expelling them from Judea by any means necessary.
- The Essenes, who lived in the desert, believed God’s kingdom would come by withdrawing and separating oneself, adhering to the written law and engaging in severe self-discipline.
- If you didn’t fit into any of these groups, you probably felt your head, like ours, swimming with all of the differing voices.

But Christ had a different answer altogether.

He said that God's kingdom was not something that was far away, but that it was among them, even then. It was not something to be brought about by strict adherence to the Old Testament law. It was not something that would happen by cooperating and benefiting from Roman rule. It was not found by withdrawing and waiting. It was a spiritual kingdom, in the present day for those who were citizens of it, with no end, consisting of everything good, pure, holy, and true.

The Invitation

The invitation to those listening to Jesus was to enter into God's kingdom, on His terms, in His way. This invitation is still open to us today. God's kingdom is as much of a reality now and exists in the present day for us as it did then for them.

But how do we become citizens of this kingdom? How do we enter into it? This is an essential question we must answer as we continue our study of Christ's words on the Sermon on the Mount.

First, becoming a citizen of God's kingdom requires recognizing that you, like the rest of humankind, have tried to live life on your own terms, APART FROM God's kingdom. It is by understanding and accepting Christ's sacrifice for your sin as the only way to be right with God again. And by acknowledging Him as Lord of your life, giving your full allegiance to Him. If you have done this, you ARE a citizen of this kingdom. If you have not yet, this invitation from our Lord is open for you! He loves you! Christ died to give YOU access to be a part of this kingdom.

Isn't this such good news? That is what the Gospel means - good news. Instead of having to grit our teeth to gain access to the kingdom, we are FIRST granted citizenship and given the Holy Spirit! Then, by His power and what He does on the inside of us, rather than on our own strength, we can do what needs to be done, to live the good life, as mapped out by Christ in this sermon. Jesus' invitation is

still open today. If you have questions, please do not let this invitation slip by. We encourage you to engage with your Community Group or reach out to one of our pastors here at Northwest Hills.

The Sermon on the Mount - what the good life really looks like

Back to the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew chapters 5 to 7. We spent the first part of our year in the Beatitudes. Here, Christ defines what a citizen of God's kingdom looks like, done only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Together, we dove into each of these statements, contrasting Jesus' teaching to the world's version of the good life.

As we continue through the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continues to invite us to flip the script back to the way things were originally intended, showing us how we are to live in God's kingdom, here and now. Jesus offers us and the world something so much better!!!

Let's continue to "script the flip"!

WEEK 1

WEEK ONE

Matthew 5:13-16

SUNDAY MESSAGE NOTES

Sunday, January 12

SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 5:13-16

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 5:13-16

Just as salt enhances the food upon which it is sprinkled, we, too, are granted the unique role of enhancing the world in which we live. As followers of Christ, we are called to not just exist, but to create a world that is full of vibrancy and flavor through spreading the love of Christ. Our actions, our words, and our faith all serve to influence the world around us for the better by bringing out the very best in every person and every circumstance.

But the goodness of salt doesn't just end with the seasoning of an otherwise bland meal, it also acts as a preservative. In a time where there was no refrigeration, salt was used in Jesus' time as a way to preserve the food to prevent it from spoiling. Just the same, followers of Christ were called upon to preserve the goodness of the earth by living out the Word. Today, we carry the same calling in that it is our job to prevent the world around us from becoming rotten and to instead continue to protect the goodness of God's creation.

In order to fully live up to our "salty" potential, it is crucial that we keep from allowing ourselves to grow stale. Just as salt can become bland over time, we too can become less effective if not continually allowing Christ to work in us, enhancing our own saltiness. In order to continue to enhance and preserve the goodness of the world, it is imperative that we continue to grow in our relationship with Christ. We must constantly feed our working knowledge of the Word and maintain a healthy passion for Christ if we are to continue to influence the world around us to seek God's love.

While a world without salt can grow tasteless and spoiled, one that is hidden behind a shroud of darkness can become filled with all that is evil. Where darkness allows worldly lies to fester and evolve, light reveals all that is right and true. It is for this reason that Jesus calls us to be a light. We are to stand tall for all the world to see as we cast our

rays out on the world around us. We are not to hide God's love within us, but rather, we are to radiate what it means to be a follower of Christ. We must leave no doubt to anyone that we are a child of God and through the light that we shine, we are to show the world what it means to Love like Jesus, Live like Jesus, and to Make Him known and in so doing, glorify our Father in heaven.

-Wendy Evans-

LECTIO DIVINA || MATTHEW 5:13-16

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“You are the salt of the earth, but 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. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. 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.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don’t rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.

MEMORIZE || WEEK 1

Option A: MATTHEW 5:16

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.

Option B: MATTHEW 5:13-16

You are the salt of the earth, but 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. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. 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.



SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 5:17-20

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 5:17-20

The idea of grace—of God forgiving us though we don't deserve it—is central to our faith. Therefore, we're not comfortable when we hear Jesus saying that he did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. Didn't he come to set us free from rules?

These words were spoken to Jews, people who understood that their right standing before God was based on faithfully living out the laws presented in the Old Testament (in the Law and the Prophets). They had identified some 600 specific rules to be obeyed. But there were uncertainties. Different leaders among them had different views on specific rules and how to interpret them. There were ongoing debates about which among the rules were more important, and which was the most important. Jesus will speak to the question of which is the most important.

But here he speaks to an even more important truth: Jesus *fulfills* the Law and the Prophets. The Law and the Prophets were a shadow of the good things, a shadow of Jesus. The Pharisees and teachers looked hard to find eternal life in the Law and Prophets, not recognizing that they pointed to Jesus. Jesus himself is the culmination of all of the Old Testament. (See Hebrews 10:1-10, John 5:39, and Romans 10:4.)

This recognition positions us to understand the sections that follow in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is going to tell the religious leaders and everyday people that their efforts to define the Laws into a set of manageable rules were not enough. It was a discouraging message but one that allowed them to see the hopeful message of salvation in Jesus. Jesus 'scripted the flip.'

-Paul Berg-

LECTIO DIVINA || MATTHEW 5:17-20

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

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Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

MEMORIZE || WEEK 2

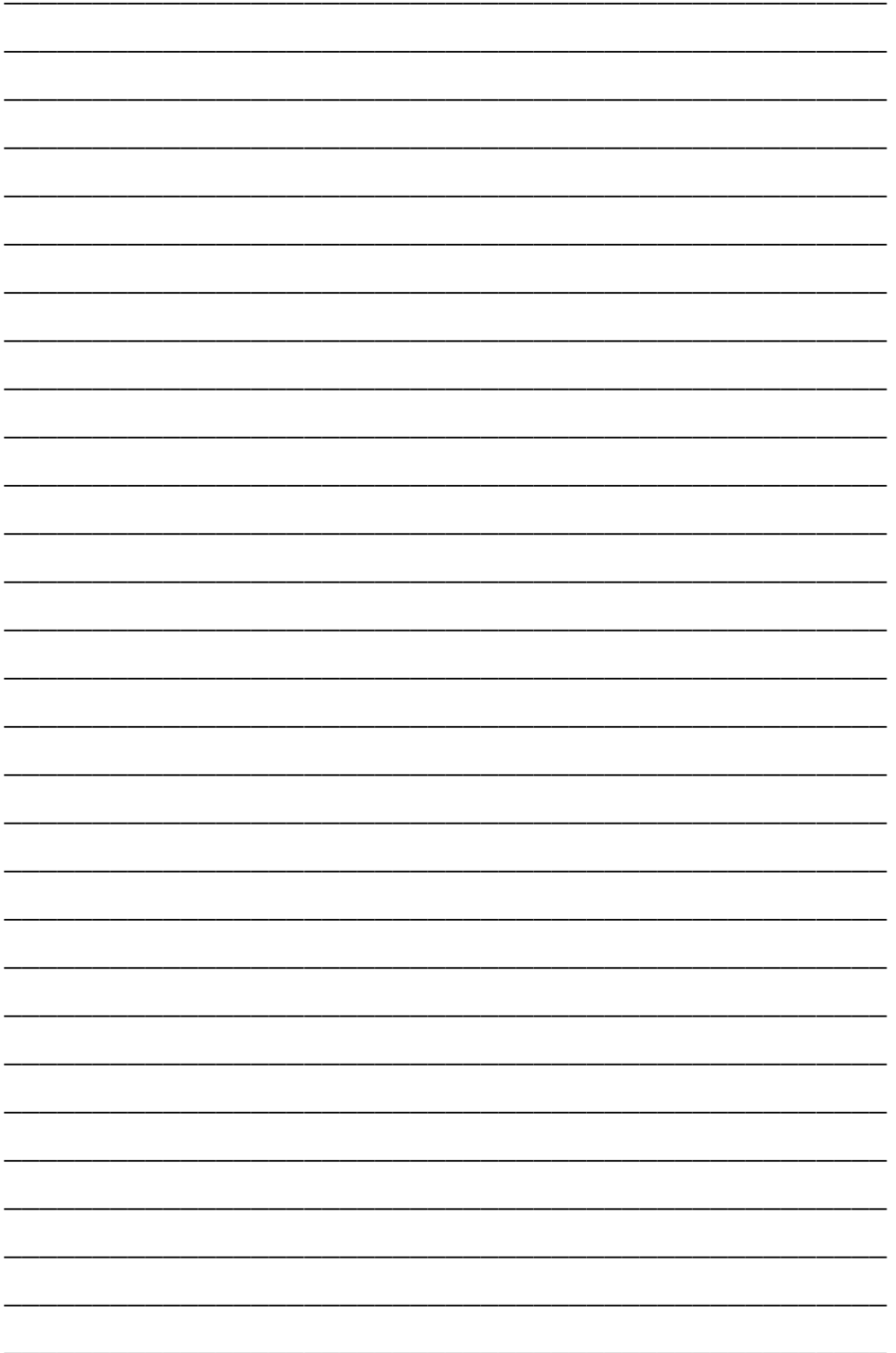
Option A: MATTHEW 5:17

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.

Option B: MATTHEW 5:17-20

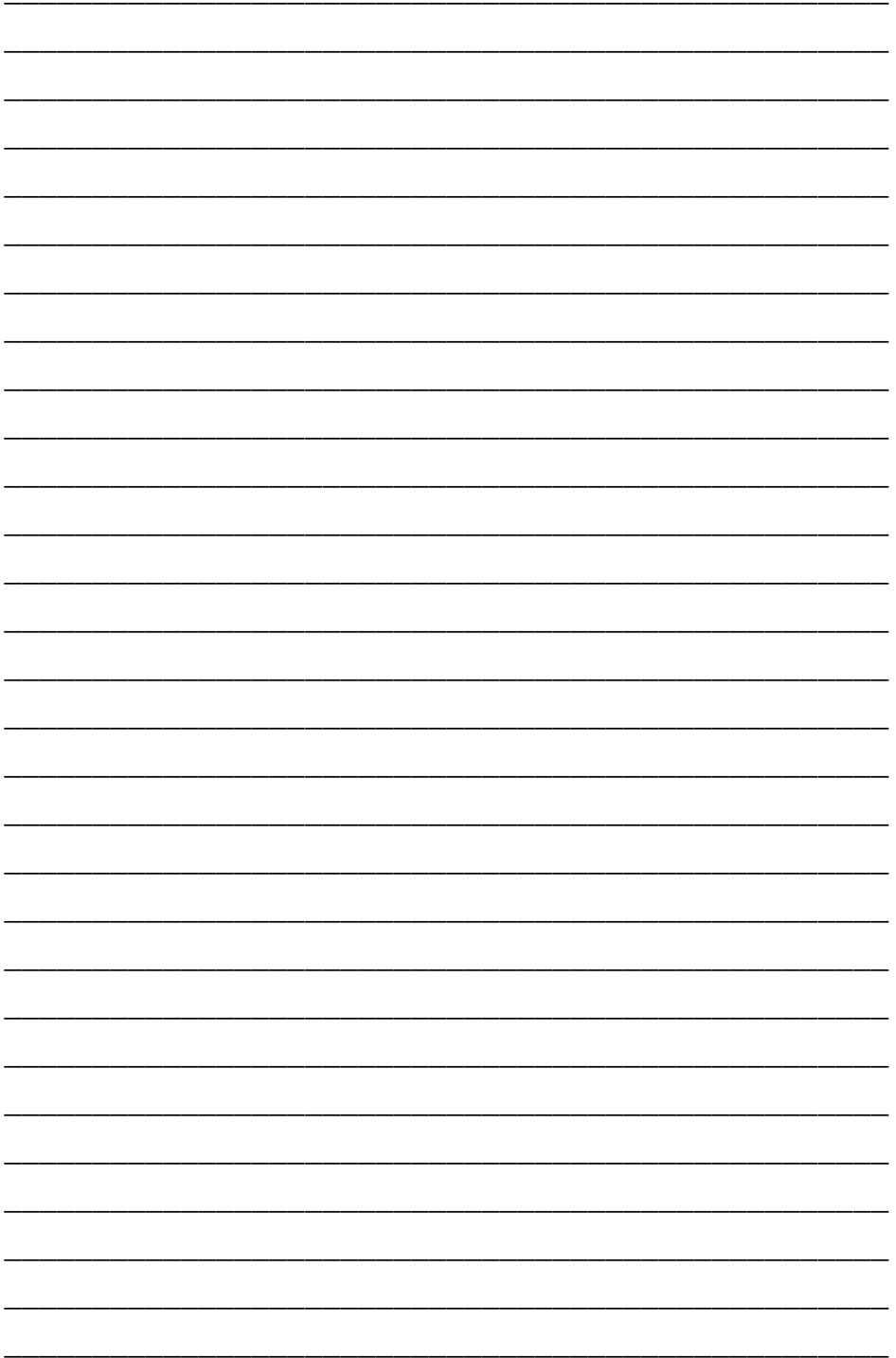
Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

WEEK 3



SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 5:21-26

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.



Reflecting on the text

Matthew 5:21-26

Something so revolutionary about Jesus' teachings was the authority which He spoke, and how He continually expounded on the commandments that were given in the OT. Today's passage fits perfectly with this. After describing the nature of His kingdom and the use of the Law & Prophets, we see Jesus "scripting the flip" with how people come to express anger amongst themselves. Starting in verse 21 of Matthew chapter 5, Jesus begins by saying "You have heard that it was said." In this section, and many others after, this phrase should be an immediate sign that Jesus is going to expound on something that people believe, scripting the flip on that belief. In our case, Jesus references that "You shall not murder" (think back to the 6th of the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20), yet Jesus' response is that "everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment." Jesus wants those hearing and reading to understand that He cares more than just what we see on the outside, Jesus cares about our hearts. Like many encounters that Jesus had with the Pharisees, Jesus is looking to expose the inward problem of sin within the religious leaders. Later in Matthew chapter 23, we see Jesus compare the religious leaders to cups cleaned only on the outside while being filthy on the inside, and for our passage here in Matthew 5, Jesus relates this to anger between people. Very much today, murder is considered sinful, yet any action including slandering & murderous thoughts are fair game. Jesus is showing us that following the 6th commandment isn't simply not shedding the blood of our fellow brother, but it is in seeking fellowship as well.

One thing we should address is that we see examples of the Father expressing anger in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 9:8, 1 Kings 11:9, Zech 1:2) and we see examples of Jesus being angry with the Pharisees (Mark 3:5 & Matthew 23:17), among other passages. Is Jesus being hypocritical during this sermon? Well, the answer is NO! Anger isn't inherently sinful; however, we do know that the

nature of anger leads to action. In some cases, we see it leading to righteous acts and in other cases it leads to sinful acts. Because we are corrupted by sin, we tend to act on the former.

Going back to the passage in verses 23-26 Jesus is challenging our tendency just to focus on what people see on the outside. On the outside someone could still go to church and look fine, but on the inside, they are being consumed by rage and contempt for their neighbor. Jesus is making the connection that the anger being harbored is akin to murdering that neighbor, and instead immediate reconciliation should be sought, lest we be consumed and be judged rightly. Ultimately, Jesus will call His followers to model this forgiveness and reconciliation because He is the ultimate example of forgiveness and reconciliation for the sins of the world. We all have been forgiven and reconciled for many things, so let's do the same to our brothers & sisters every day.

-Jacob Mills-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment’. 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. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 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. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,

As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.”

You also might like to journal what was discovered and spoken about at the end of this time.

MEMORIZE || WEEK 4

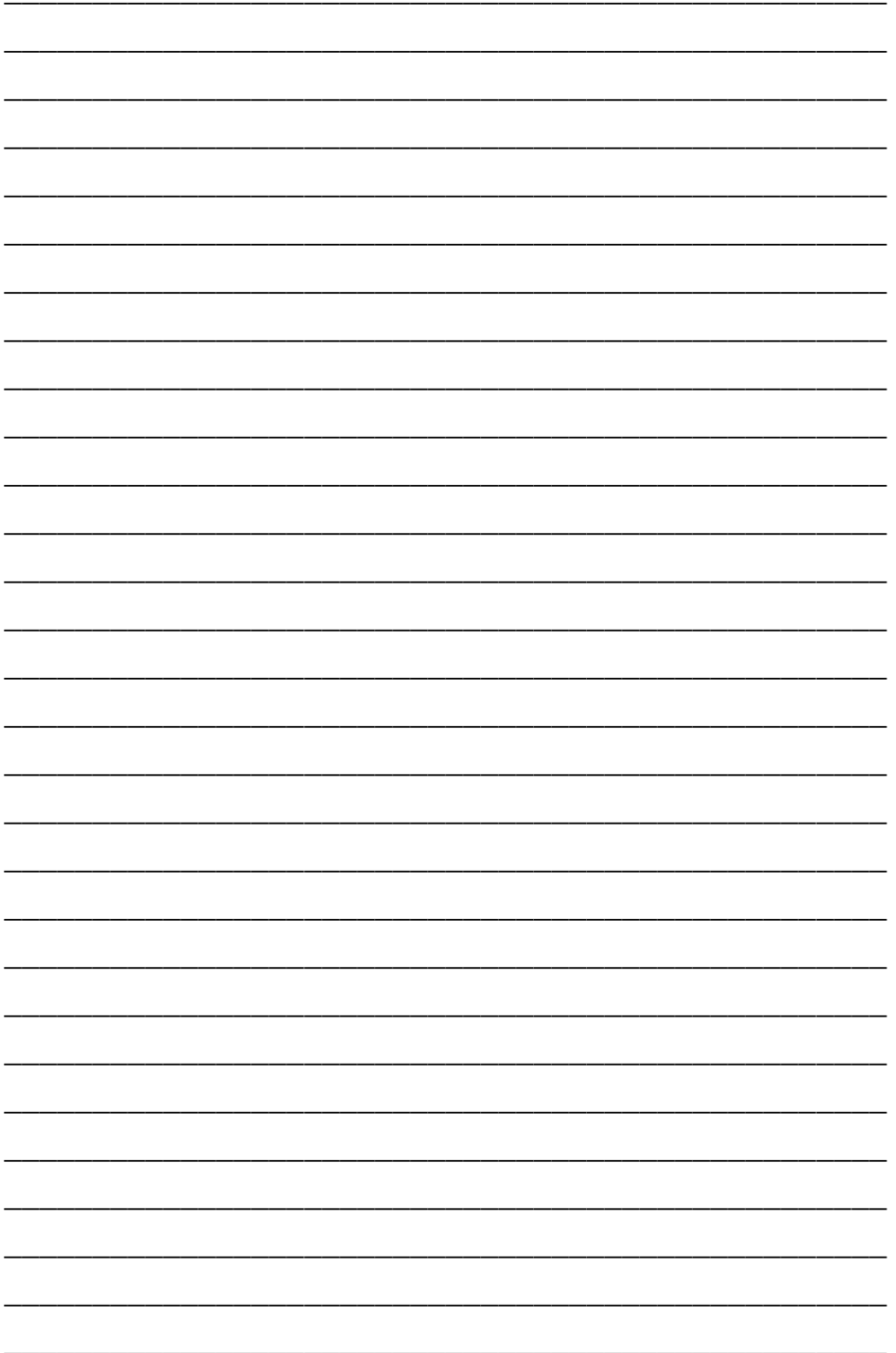
Option A: MATTHEW 5:23-24

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Option B: MATTHEW 5:21-26

You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment'. 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. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 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. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.





SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 5:27-30

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 5:27-30

Jesus deeply desires your whole heart.

Later in Matthew, when asked by the Pharisees which is the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus responds, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40).

The Lord commands the devotion of His people with every ounce of their being—not just in their actions but also in the “hidden” realm of their thoughts and desires. Yet, lust is in direct disobedience to this greatest command with the insidious nature of corrupting the temple of the Holy Spirit within believers (1 Cor. 6). Even further, committing adultery in one’s heart through the objectification of a person bearing God’s image is in stark opposition to loving our neighbor.

God’s desire for our undivided love has been clear, even from the time of Moses. And it has always been for the good of His people so that they might dwell with Him. After He gives the same command to the nation of Israel (to love Him with all their being), He says, “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart”... “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deut. 6:4-8).

As believers, how might we also remember to present our members (our hands and eyes) as instruments of righteousness to honor the Lord instead of letting them serve our sinful desires?

Jesus uses intense language that it is better for the eye to be torn out or the hand to be cut off than to have the whole body thrown into hell—this is not meant to be interpreted as an instruction to cause

physical harm to your body. Rather, this teaching helps us grasp the seriousness of giving allowance for sin in our lives. Any pruning necessary to fully devote ourselves to Jesus is worth it because the consequences are eternal.

If we allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts for anything that is leading us astray, we will realize that we are desperately in need of a power that is greater than ourselves to deliver us—we are incapable of becoming pure in heart on our own! Confess your sin and set your eyes on Christ, who ought to be the truest object of our affection, and He will create a clean heart in you.

When we struggle with temptations of lust and other misplaced desires, we can take great comfort in knowing that our God is abounding in steadfast love and mercy towards us, and that in Christ, we are a new creation. Jesus gave up his entire body for you and me, a completely sinless body that was worthy to clear the iniquities of all those who believe in Him for eternity. And even more remarkable, it was our sin that put him on that cross! How else can we respond but seek to love and glorify Him with all our heart, soul, and mind?

-Emma Allen-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 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. 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.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don’t rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

MEMORIZE || WEEK 4

Option A: MATTHEW 5:27-28

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Option B: MATTHEW 5:27-30

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 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. 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.



WEEK FIVE

MATTHEW 5:31-32

SUNDAY MESSAGE NOTES

Sunday, February 9

SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 5:31-32

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 5:31-32

Over the past 60 years in America, nearly every empirical indicator of healthy marriages has shown dramatic decline. Not only has the divorce rate progressively increased, but now more than half of all people live together without the commitment of marriage. In 1960 virtually no one did. Current norms on sexuality and gender are compounding the relational brokenness and confusion about what God intends to be central to our human experience of joy, faithfulness and holiness. Marriage was artfully created by God for good and so many are missing out on that goodness.

The sad reality is that humankind has always struggled to fully enjoy the gift of marriage. Our current crisis of commitment is not a new story. It didn't take long for things to go south (see Genesis 3). The downward slide of humanity missing out on God's good design continues through the narratives of the Old Testament. God's intent for thriving marriages had become an unholy mess. The institution of marriage had been continually defamed.

Reflecting on the Old Testament narratives of marriages, and passages such as Genesis 2:21-25, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and Jeremiah 3, Jesus calls those listening (and us today) to elevate our value and practice of marriage, relationship, and commitment. Marriage is holy covenant, not self-involved convenience.

In Mt. 5:31-32, Jesus flips the cultural and religious script with a radical word concerning marriage and divorce. What culture was allowing to exist as legitimate justification for separating what God had brought together was neither right nor godly. Jesus is reminding those present that marriage and relationships with others are not merely things to be consumed, easily dismissed, and to be taken lightly. These institutions are intentional and reflect the design of God's relationship with us. Therefore, faithfulness was to be prized and protected.

Jesus' words here were especially life-giving to the women in the crowd. Under existing laws and customs, they were the ones most often vulnerable and victimized. Jesus is therefore primarily addressing the men in the crowd and underlining the lasting effects of their callous disregard for God's design for marriage to be a sacred covenant. "Hey guys," Jesus is saying, "neither marriage nor women are disposable!"

Although the cultural and legal pendulum has radically swung from the day Jesus spoke these words, and women need to equally hear the words "neither marriage nor men are disposable!" this remains a timely word for us all. Marriage is to be treasured and fought for. Covenants are meant for keeping.

When a marriage relationship is ended, its hurtful impact goes beyond the two within the broken relationship. While our hearts ache for those that have lost that expression of oneness that we are wired to experience and take joy in, the redeeming message of the gospel is that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. This is why we elevate the covenant and give grace to those who have suffered the breaking of this covenant. We are all broken people in a broken world. But Jesus has a better way and a higher expectation for our marriages.

-an unnamed contributor-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don’t rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

MEMORIZE || WEEK 5

Option A: MATTHEW 5:31-32

It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Option B: MATTHEW 5:31-32

It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

WEEK 6

WEEK SIX

MATTHEW 5:33-37

SUNDAY MESSAGE NOTES

Sunday, February 16

A series of 28 horizontal lines providing a writing area for text.

SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 5:33-37

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 5:33-37

Oaths were intended for people to keep their promises and discourage them from making false ones. Oaths were commonplace for people to make during Jesus' time. When one made an oath during Jesus' time, they would make them towards things created by God (sky and land), instead of swearing to God Himself, so they would not mention His name and they could back out of oaths. When one gives an oath to God, they are making themselves accountable to Him.

The prevalence of oaths revealed that humans were very comfortable with telling lies. During Jesus' time, teachers enjoyed twisting the truth, especially God's word. When they read a law that made them feel uncomfortable, they would shorten it to something attainable. This may have sounded attractive to people; however, it was disrespectful not only towards God but also goes against the Ten Commandments. When one violates their oath, they are not only tempted to sin, but they also are breaking the ninth commandment, which says "you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16).

People have been breaking oaths since Adam and Eve were alive. In fact, the first time an oath was given by God and broken by a person was in Genesis, chapter 2, when God gave His first commandment to Adam: "you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Genesis 2:16-17). Later, the serpent twisted the words of God by telling him and Eve (his wife) that eating from this tree would make them like God, and Adam and Eve ended up lying to God. In fact, when Matthew mentioned "evil" at the end of this passage, he was referring to the serpent in the garden of Eden, who twisted the words of God to Adam and Eve so they would sin (Genesis 3).

As it was for people during Jesus' time, we have oaths today because humans are encouraged to tell lies. We learn to lie as young children and get cleverer in our lies as we get older. Contrary to our world, Jesus values being truthful with our words. When one is honest, they are acknowledging that they are speaking to individuals created by God. This may be uncomfortable because it requires us to examine our hearts, acknowledge our sin, and we may have to face consequences for our actions. However, facing Jesus' truth encourages us to forgive ourselves and others, as He forgave us on the cross.

-Jeanie Stouffer-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“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.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

You also might like to journal what was discovered and spoken about at the end of this time.

MEMORIZE || WEEK 6

Option A: MATTHEW 5:37

Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

Option B: MATTHEW 5:33-37

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.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

WEEK 7

WEEK SEVEN

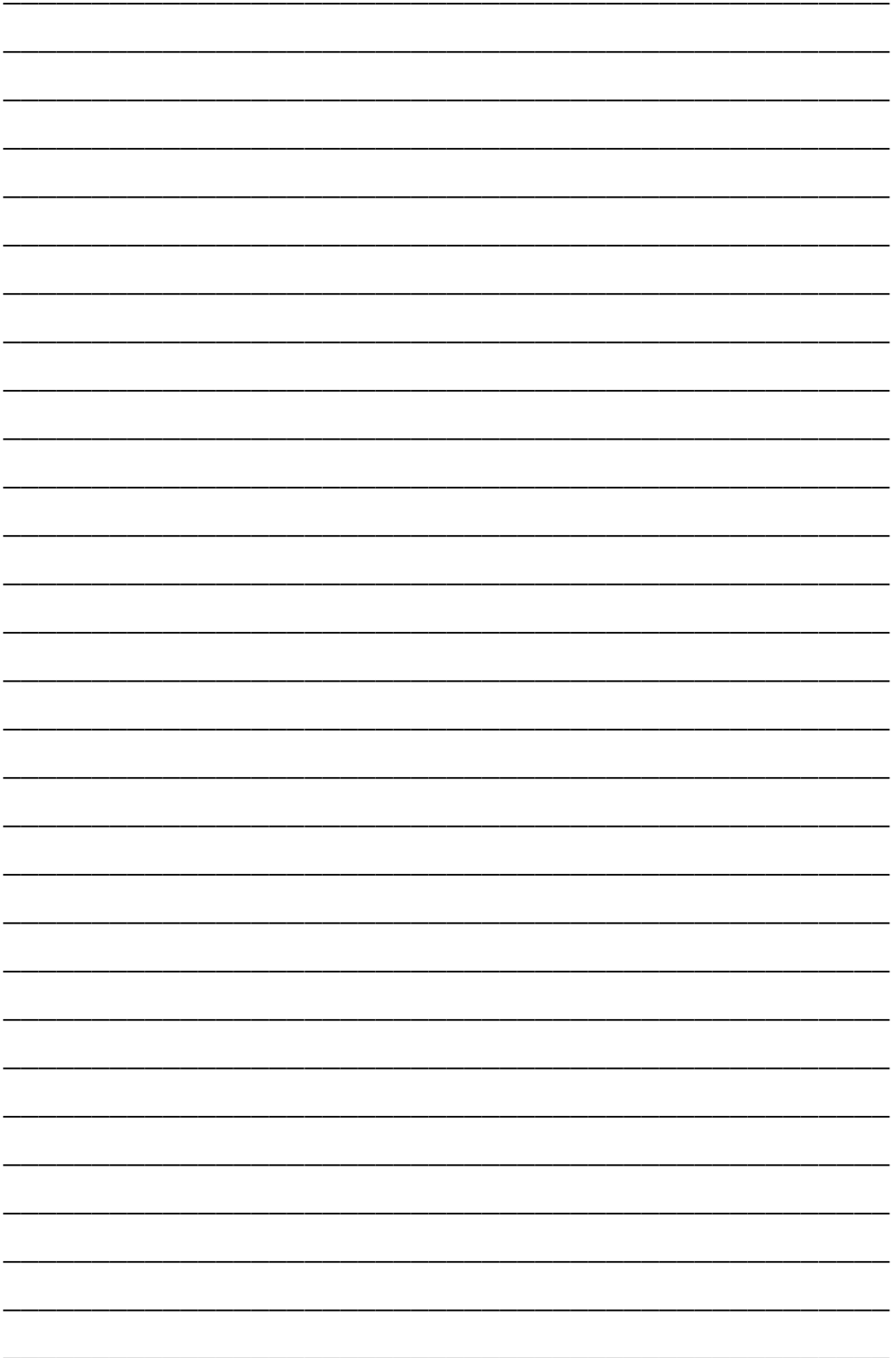
MATTHEW 5:38-42

SUNDAY MESSAGE NOTES

Sunday, February 23

SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 5:38-42

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.



Reflecting on the text

Matthew 5:38-42

How deep is our desire for retribution, to get even with those who hurt us and perhaps even more so when the hurt involves the people we love? Paybacks show up in very young children, along with the idea that if we give back worse than we got, the other person will back down. Unfortunately, it seldom works out that way. Does it get better as we get older? Perhaps it is more sophisticated, but not better. A simple shoving match can quickly turn into a brawl, a bit of teasing or name calling can result in things said that are never forgotten or forgiven and 1,000 killed on one side of a conflict can result in 40,000 dead on the other side. How poignant it is that Jesus uses the word repent in Matthew 4:17, calling us to walk away from the sin we want to commit and to change our minds about things we have long held to be true. In this passage He asks us to change our minds about retribution or revenge - "You have heard that it was said...But I say to you..."

This is the fifth time, out of six times after the beatitudes, that Jesus refers to a principle the disciples would have heard taught by the religious elites in their culture - the scribes and the Pharisees. But Jesus said back in 5:20 that the righteousness of His disciples must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees or they wouldn't be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In this instance He is quoting from the Old Testament in Exodus 21:22-25, Leviticus 24:17-21 and Deuteronomy 19:15-21. As background, these Old Testament laws had several essential features:

1. The retribution or recompense was to be implemented by people in authority and not by the injured person.
2. The punishment was to be equal, not escalating or exceeding the original harm.
3. The punishment was not mandatory. Forgiveness was always an option. Another option was to walk away and leave it with God. He had told His people in Deuteronomy 32:35, "Vengeance is mine, and retribution" and it is in the context of

not taking vengeance in Leviticus 19:17-18 that God says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself".

It is interesting how quickly Jesus' focus shifts from the injured person to the person doing the injuring. Rather than exacting revenge the way the scribes and Pharisees taught and practiced with their twisted version of the Old Testament Law, Jesus says, "Do not resist an evil person". This is the general principle; the key to the four situational examples Jesus uses. But we need to back up a bit and think about what our options are in responding to a wrong done to us. Here are five possibilities:

1. Full blown revenge plus a bit more for good measure, administered by ourselves and perhaps some friends, without any oversight from legal authorities.
2. Supervised revenge that is adjudicated and administered by those in authority, consistent with the Old Testament principles.
3. Do nothing and let God administer justice, but still holding on to the wrong, without forgiveness and perhaps being glad when the person experiences misfortune.
4. Forgive the person and let go of the wrong.
5. Go above and beyond forgiveness; being kind in the face of unkindness and actually caring for the person doing the wrong

Jesus' focus is always on the Kingdom of Heaven. You hear it in the very first thing He teaches in Matthew 4:17 - "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". In other words, "Change your thinking about everything because the Kingdom of Heaven is available to you if you do." Jesus always has an eternal perspective in mind and He always interacts with people in a way that maximizes the potential that they will enter His eternal and grace-filled kingdom. This portion of the Sermon on the Mount, as with all of the sermon, is no exception. Jesus is asking His disciples, when someone wrongs you, how can you react in a way that maximizes the potential they will enter My kingdom? The answer is, "Do not resist an evil person." The follow on question the disciples might be asking in their minds at this point could be, "What do we do instead of retribution?" In answer, Jesus provides four examples in verses 39-42:

1. "Whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also." The mental image here for the disciples, and for us, would be a back-handed slap, which is a particularly intense insult.
2. "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also." This would mean both your inner and outer garment. If you were very poor, the outer garment might be what you slept in at night to keep warm (Exodus 22:26ff).
3. "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two." This refers to the right a Roman soldier had to demand a non-Roman carry his gear for one mile. This was a particularly aggravating and humiliating thing to have a military member of a Gentile, oppressive nation rub your nose in the domination of your people in a very personal way.
4. "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you." If Jesus is talking about "an evil person", it seems like this is the type of person who won't pay back what is given or give back what is borrowed.

It seems very clear from these examples that Jesus is giving instructions that are absolutely counter to our natural inclinations. He is saying we need to turn away from (repent) our natural way of thinking and adopt a kingdom way of thinking. These example responses maximize the potential that the person doing the wrong might enter Christ's Kingdom.

So what is your answer to the questions, "What do I do instead of exacting revenge?" and "How do I maximize the potential that the person wronging me might enter Christ's Kingdom?" Think of times when others have wronged you. It may have involved family, friends, co-workers, business interactions, church goers or many others. What does that interaction look like if you respond with loving kindness and attempt to maximize the possibility that the person will move toward or actually enter Christ's Kingdom? Can you change your mind about those situations so that when you are wronged in the future, you can respond the way Jesus did and the way He is asking you to in these verses? What are some things you can do and think to make this more likely? Meditate on the end of Jesus' life here on earth and the four

examples He gives above. How does He model them at the end of His earthly life?

-Steve Biornstad-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

You also might like to journal what was discovered and spoken about at the end of this time.

MEMORIZE || WEEK 7

Option A: MATTHEW 5:38-42

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

Option B: MATTHEW 5:38-42

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

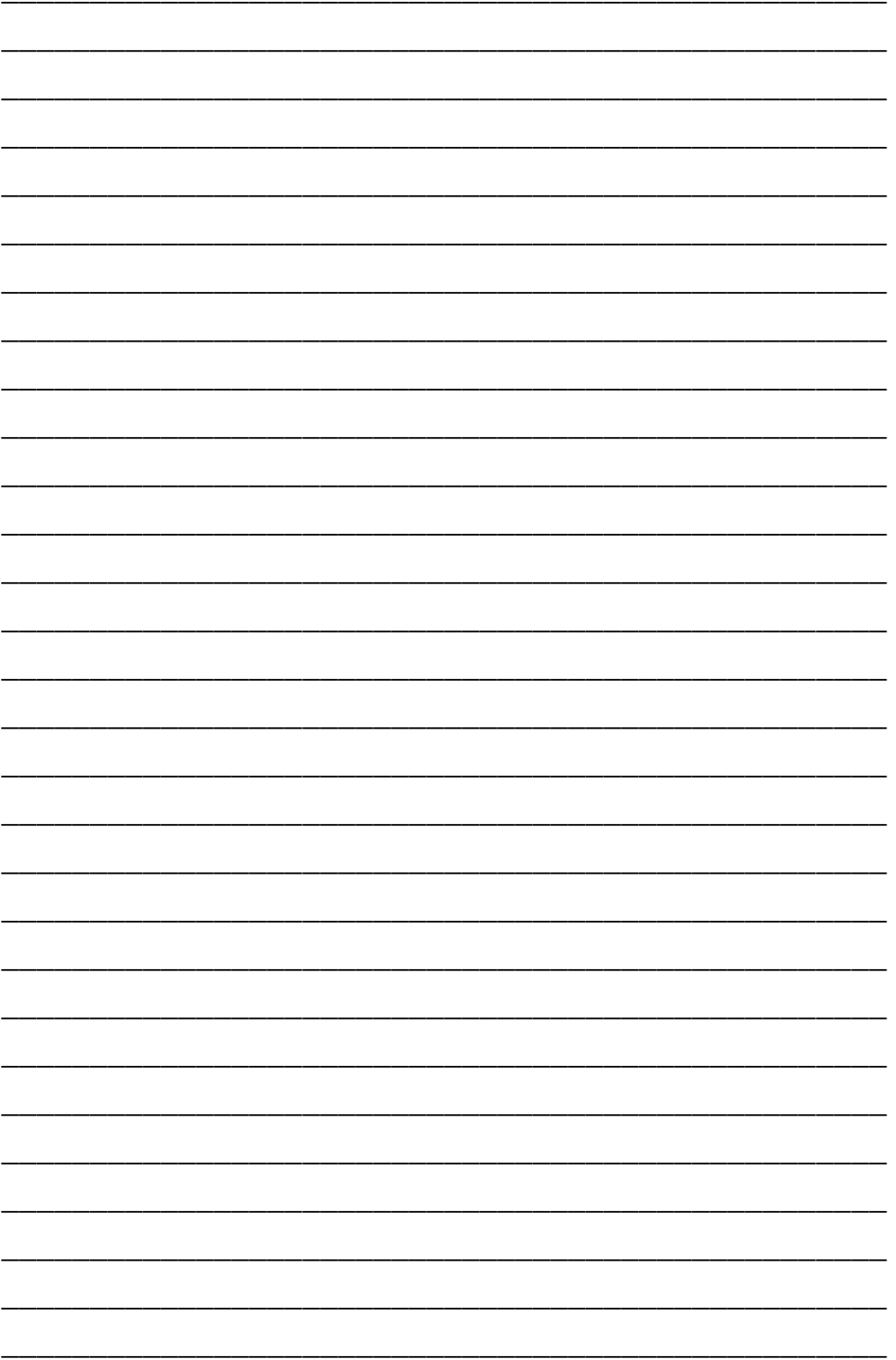


WEEK EIGHT

MATTHEW 5:43-48

SUNDAY MESSAGE NOTES

Sunday, March 2



SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 5:43-48

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 5:43-48

This scripture presents the way of righteous living for those who are in God's family. It contrasts the new way of loving everyone, even our enemies with the old way of hating your enemies, which was taught by the scribes and Pharisees as their means of promoting Jewish superiority and spiritual smugness. In addition, the Jews were also challenged by the Roman's strategy of merging Roman worship with the Jewish faith.

This teaching by Jesus is a continuation of the call to repent (Matthew 4:17) or to "change your way of thinking". This truth is still challenging, but it is our responsibility to do it by the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16) even in an environment that is permeated by division, misunderstanding, brokenness, hopelessness and even hate.

The Law of Love Illuminated

- **"You have heard that it was said,"** (v.43). Jesus is speaking primarily to an uneducated and misinformed audience. By using this phrase Jesus points out that "hate your enemies" is not in the Old Testament as a moral teaching, but "love your neighbor" is (Leviticus 19:18). The Pharisees implied that "hating your enemy" was God's way of judging their enemies. This should be a caution for us as well, even in a highly educated society, where acquiescing to relative cultural norms or to progressive Christianity runs counter to the virtues and truth found in scripture.
- **"But I say to you,"** (v.44). Jesus speaks with the authority of Israel's true King and states that Israel should demonstrate God's love even to their enemies. This practice is not commanded in the Old Testament!

- **Love your enemies because God loves all His creation,** (v.45). God’s love extends to everyone under the sun and the rain. Jesus instructed Israel that they should be a conduit of His unconditional love and by this demonstrate that they are God’s people, (Matthew 5:16).
- **Do not practice segregation in your relationships,** (v.46-47). The Pharisees, tax gatherers and pagans only relate to those who share a mutual love, affiliation or affection for each other. And, if we do the same, what good is it as an ambassador of Christ? So, engage friends and enemies alike, by extending God’s love to *everyone* you encounter, not just your immediate family, friends or brothers and sisters in Christ.
- **“Therefore, you are to be perfect” (whole, mature, complete)** (v.48). How? By pursuing God’s righteous standard. Just as Paul taught in Philippians 3:12-14 that it is his duty to desire, and aim at, and press toward perfection in grace and holiness. “Surely the reward (prize) we long for is the glory of God Himself and the perfected companionship of Christ.” (Piper, John. *Desiring God* on Hebrews 26).

Our Duty/His Power

How is God’s perfection played out in our everyday lives? We are to abound in His love for example, by forgiving injuries, praying for those who have hurt you, entertaining strangers, and doing good to the evil and to the unthankful. Then we will be like Him and exhibit a “higher rule” than the world around us.

We must be intentional in this endeavor by praying for God to change our hearts to love others unconditionally even as He does for you and

for me. Take the step, outside of your circle of friends and reach out to someone who you would not normally engage with to encourage them or pray for them.

-Clay Donne-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward to you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

You also might like to journal what was discovered and spoken about at the end of this time.

MEMORIZE || WEEK 8

Option A: MATTHEW 5:44-45

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

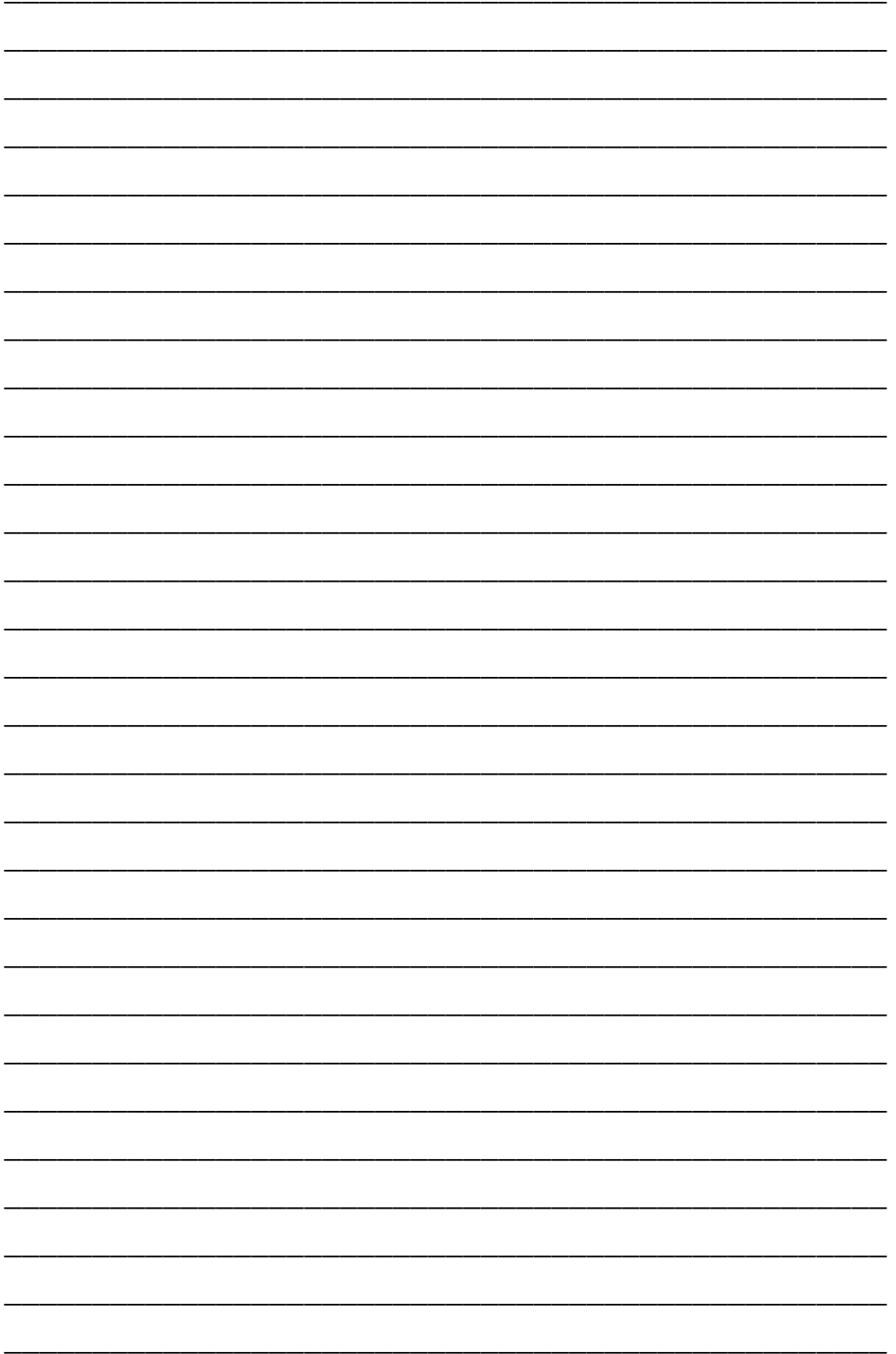
Option B: MATTHEW 5:43-48

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

WEEK 9

SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 6:1-4

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.



Reflecting on the text

Matthew 6:1-4

I grew up in a dysfunctional family with an overworked, single parent. I believed I was only loved when I was doing something praiseworthy. So, I tried to do everything to earn acceptance and attention, and love, by being the child who behaved and performed. At school, I received all the awards and gold stars. In the world, I never stepped out of line-- I was a rule follower; labeled by my siblings as "the golden child" who could do no wrong. It wasn't until I came to know Jesus that this entire script was rewritten. As a child of God, now I know I don't need to do anything to earn his love. He is a God of grace; therefore, I don't need to perform to know I am fully accepted by Jesus and fully loved by Him.

Imagine the disciples and large crowd gathering near Jesus on the mountain to listen to His sermon, hanging on to each new word. After all, here was this man who could preach as a Rabbi does (though He had no formal education), and who could heal broken bodies and hearts. Those who gathered came from earthly families that had their own dysfunctions and physical and emotional pain. Like me, these hurting people and all generations before them, believed they had to earn their way to proper status and righteousness. They strove to keep every law to avoid punishment and to prove that they were worthy of respect and praise. They were probably confused and baffled by Jesus' message. Instead of revenge and retribution, hypocrisy and judgment, and works and deeds, Jesus preached grace and mercy, redemption and restoration, love and forgiveness.

Historically the Israelites were living under the law and not under grace, and their good works and religiosity weren't necessarily to please God. In their sinful nature, they began to do deeds-- like giving to the poor and needy-- to receive their reward from men. Probably

not unlike filling out a large donation check in view of others; the crowd of people were living to earn praise, hoping to be labeled as faithful and generous. I think we can all relate to this because we are all sinners and desire to have a good name and esteem; however, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warns us not to do good deeds to earn praise from people. He calls people who do this hypocrites, giving with the wrong motive and scheming for how their generosity would benefit them (Matthew 6:2). This selfish act does not have a heart set on God's glory or the needy person receiving the gift. The giver has a "What's in it for me?" attitude. Jesus instead instructs the disciples, and us, to act generously to the needy in secret. He said the Father will see what is done in secret and we will be rewarded (Matthew 6:4). My motive, though, is not in the reward, but in the relationship that I am building with a loving Father and the Holy Spirit, which then prompts me to love people the way He does.

If I want to Love Jesus, Live like Jesus, and Make Him known then I can start by knowing that our love relationship is based on His grace alone and that I can only love Him because He loved me first (1 John 4:19). It doesn't grow by trying to earn it with works and good deeds. It is grown as we lay aside pride, past hurts, and our desires to be seen as generous and "perfect" and live as Jesus did. While we are stretched to live as He did-- praying, reading the Word, fasting, and making sacrifices-- we are falling more in love with Him. From this, our desire and passion to make Jesus known grows. Not because we will be seen as faithful followers but because we now can love others the way Jesus loves us. In humility, this allows us to give to the needy, donate our time to ministry, and talk to our co-workers about the Lord. We ought to do all these things in secret with no bragging rights necessary. But praise God that even when I miss the mark, and am far from earning that gold star, Jesus still loves me.

The world says some of the best rewards you can earn on earth are notoriety and influence, power and prestige, charisma and charm,

money and accumulation. But Jesus says your best reward is a life lived with and for Him. When I give, I will remind myself that my public generosity towards the oppressed and hurting is a temporary earthly gain, while my selfless, obedient love to God earns a reward in the Kingdom. As I repent for how I have given in the past, I also am asking God to change my thinking and allow me to gain His wisdom on how best to serve the needy. Let us encourage each other-- as we are all on mission to love Jesus and live like Him-- we are also making Him known to a world of people who are watching and waiting for selfless, loving generosity.

-an unnamed contributor-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“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. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

MEMORIZE || WEEK 9

Option A: MATTHEW 6:3-4

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Option B: MATTHEW 6:1-4

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. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

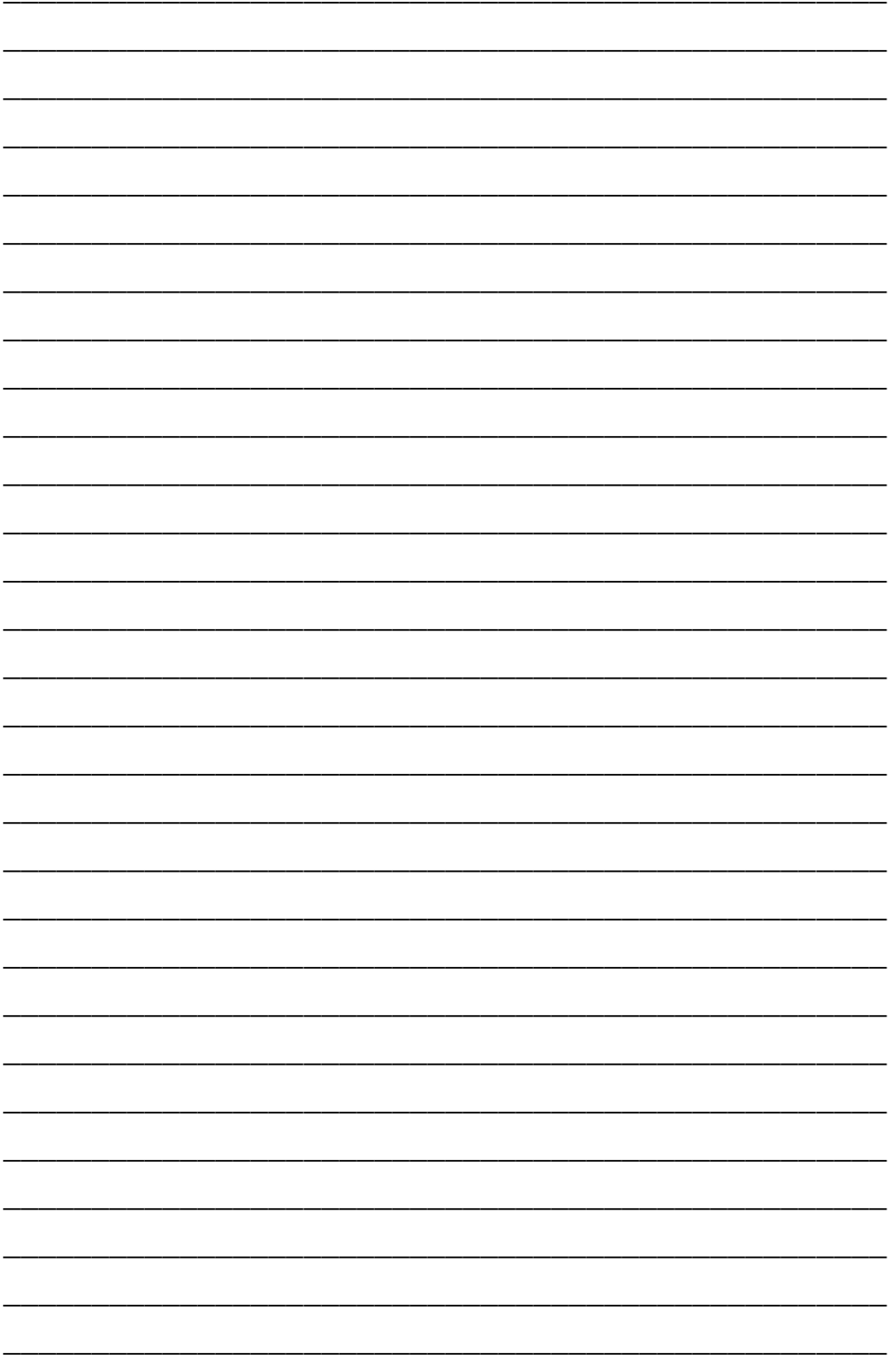


WEEK TEN

MATTHEW 6:5-15

SUNDAY MESSAGE NOTES

Sunday, March 16



SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 6:5-15

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 6:5-15

Jesus has so much to teach us and in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, He teaches us how to pray and the importance of forgiveness. First, Jesus teaches us that prayer should be a personal conversation between us and our God who loves us. Prayer can be done individually or in a group, but prayer should always be heartfelt and sincere and never done with the goal of showing off for others. Jesus tells us that we can keep our prayers simple because God already knows what we need before we even ask. His desire is for to draw near to him through prayer.

In the next section, Jesus walks us through a model prayer, known by many as The Lord's Prayer. This model prayer shows us how Jesus prayed to His Father and how we should pray to God the Father. To break it down simply, Jesus first recognizes Gods majesty and holiness and gives honor to God; He then prays for the presence of God's heavenly kingdom and God's very own will to come to earth. After focusing on God, Jesus turns the prayer toward man and directs us to ask God for His provision in both our earthly needs and our spiritual life. Specifically, Jesus teaches us to ask God to provide for our daily needs, to ask God for forgiveness of our sins and to ask God to help keep us from temptation.

Jesus calls us to use this model for our prayer life. If we ever feel that we do not know what to pray, we can go through each portion of this model prayer in conversation with God. We can start by giving God the honor, praise and glory that he deserves. We can plead with God for Him to do His will upon the earth and upon our life. We can then ask God for His daily provision in our life. We can consider areas in our life where we have sinned and need to bring that sin to God and ask for His forgiveness; and we can ask God to reveal areas of our life where are walking in sin without recognizing it. We can consider who in our life we need to forgive and ask God to reveal to us anyone we

may be holding a grudge against. We can consider temptations we are struggling with and ask for God's help in getting through these temptations. Again, we can ask God to reveal areas of temptation in our life that we are not recognizing or dealing with. We can also use this model prayer as a check on our prayer life, to verify that we are touching on each of the areas of prayer that we are called to.

This section ends by reinforcing the importance of forgiving others. We are called to not only ask God for forgiveness of our sins, but to forgive those who sin against us.

Prayer and forgiveness are fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. Jesus reveals that God desires a personal relationship with us, His children. Jesus also shows us that we have an active role to play in our relationship with God by coming to Him in prayer and by not only asking for and accepting His forgiveness of our sins, but by forgiving others who sin against us.

-John Evans-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (10 minutes)

(Note: As this is a longer passage, it is helpful to increase this time from 5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 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. 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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then like this:

‘Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.'

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

MEMORIZE || WEEK 10

Option A: Matthew 6:6

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.

Option B: MATTHEW 6:5-15

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 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. 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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.”

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.



SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 6:16-18

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 6:16-18

In Matthew 6:16-18, we hear these words from Jesus, “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. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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.”

What is fasting? Or more specifically, what is Biblical fasting? Biblical fasting is when one chooses to set aside food for a time to seek to know God more fully. Sometimes it is in pursuit of a deeper prayer time, sometimes it is in pursuit of God’s will in a particular situation, sometimes it is simply just to have a special time set aside with God. This sort of fasting is different than our culture’s version, one focused on health or body image. This one is a fast that involves our bodies AND our minds and hearts. It is focused upward on our Creator, rather than inward on ourselves. Jesus in this text is not instructing us specifically on the benefits and goal of fasting, but His instructions is on how we are to behave publicly when we fast.

When it comes to American culture today, self-promotion is commonplace. We want others to see us, applaud us, thereby proving our value and acceptance. We might even want others to want to be us. It feels so good! Yet, while it might feel good for a time, in a blink, it can vanish. People have opinions and feelings, and both of these things change. Or we will end up not living up to the standard we have proclaimed for ourselves, or others have set for us. We really will never arrive, we will fall short, and we will not live up to worldly expectations. We were never meant to. We see once again how our current culture fails us in trying to assign us our value.

And here comes the flip. Jesus' teaching on fasting flips the script on this idea of self-promotion. Instead, we are only to seek after one Person, our Creator, God Himself. If we are in Jesus, and what I mean by this is that if we have accepted Him as Lord and as the one and only way to have access to God, we never have to earn our worth. We already have it. We never have to earn His approval. We already have it. And if we already have our worth and approval from Him, we can never lose it, because it is given to us not by our performance, but through Jesus.

So, instead of promoting how pious and godly we are when we fast, which would be a fleeting reward based on the opinion of man, we just rest in the sole high purpose of drawing closer to Him, seeking after Him and enjoying Him. The reward is Him.

-Natalie Morse-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (10 minutes)

(Note: As this is a longer passage, it is helpful to increase this time from 5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“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. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

MEMORIZE || WEEK 11

Option A: Matthew 6:17-18

But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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.

Option B: MATTHEW 6:16-18

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. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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.



Reflecting on the text

Matthew 5:6:19-24

As I reflect on Matthew 6:19-24, I'm reminded we only have one life, and we can only live it one day at a time. We only have so much energy and time, so how we spend our time is important. If the enemy can distract us with amassing flashy possessions and titles that don't have heavenly value, how much time do we have for serving God? If earthly treasure is all we focus on, it starts to be all we see.

We must ask, where does all my time, energy and money go? Does how I spend my day today have eternal value? We need to take an audit of our lives and ask what are we laboring toward? Am I investing in my family, loving my neighbor, and serving the Church? Do I pray in the morning asking for God to move and give Him my day, or do I pray for MY plans to work together for the day I had orchestrated around my ideas?

Jesus' lived example was laying down His life in service to others. Storing up treasures in heaven comes with denial of self by putting others first and this looks different for each of us. Maybe it's as simple as teaching in a kid's classroom at church or as complex as living in a 3rd world country away from your family and comforts of home. We're not all asked to walk the same path, but we are all asked to lay down our lives.

We are called to be generous as our Father is generous. We are richest when we can count God as our portion, Jesus as our savior, the Spirit as our helper. We're called to give of our resources freely because the mercies of God make a heart generous. Earthly possessions won't come with us into eternity. So, are we joyful givers or worried keepers?

Authentic worship of God requires wholehearted devotion. We can't do this properly when we are worried about providing for ourselves and keeping up with culture and those around us in our opulent nation. We can spend all our time amassing all the earthly wealth within our reach, but it doesn't touch the core of our longing. It just meaninglessly fills our time here. Money has a proper place, but it's not designed to be our comfort or what our trust is in.

God is our creator, our comforter, our guide, and the lamp that lights our path. Jesus' way is better because it's true to our core identity, it's what actually makes an eternal impact and what truly fulfills us.

-Rachel Ebert-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (10 minutes)

(Note: As this is a longer passage, it is helpful to increase this time from 5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 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! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,

MEMORIZE || WEEK 12

Option A: Matthew 6:19-20

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Option B: MATTHEW 6:19-24

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 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! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

WEEK 13

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus tells us not to worry or be anxious about our lives, not even about having food to eat or clothes to wear. Most of us have abundance and yet are paradoxically crippled with anxiety and worry. Jesus points out that His way, the way of truth, is better, and we (like most things) have it all upside down.

Jesus lovingly reminds us that we have a faith issue and we have a treasure problem.

In case we forget that we are His creation, Jesus asks us to take a moment and observe that He sustains the ravens and the lilies though they have no capacity for storing things on earth or striving for beauty. If we, as God's children, are so precious (Matthew 10:29-31) should He not sustain all our needs as we turn towards Him? Do our hearts truly believe and trust in God's sovereignty and faithfulness or are we swept into the lie that we are the source of our provision as we strive to build up our bank accounts, fill our pantries with goods and obsess over our physical appearance and health?

If we fail to believe and trust in Jesus and place our value on the things of this world, we are likely to be consumed not only by worry but also by an unsatisfied greed as we look to ourselves and the world to fill us. Jesus knows this and shows us a different way.

It is no mistake that Jesus addresses our worry-prone hearts following His teaching on where we store our treasures (Matthew 6:19-24; Luke 12:15-21). Worry and anxiety are results of placing too much value on the things of this temporal, passing world. Our eyes, our minds and our hearts are often fixed on the wrong things and our state of worry is based on our all-too-attentive care and even protectiveness of our own financial, physical and emotional health as well as our appearance. Jesus tells us that we are to instead chase after the

kingdom and righteousness He speaks of all throughout the Sermon on the Mount. That we should pursue, above all else, to glorify God and obey His teachings and “all of these things” that we need “will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:31).

It is important to note that Jesus is not suggesting we live an irresponsible or apathetic life. On the contrary, we are to be generous (Matthew 25:31-46) and not be idle (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). We should have no worry about the days ahead (Matthew 6:34). We are to invest our hearts, minds and resources into Christ’s kingdom. We are to be all in for today without anxiety.

-Stacie Fulcher-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (10 minutes)

(Note: As this is a longer passage, it is helpful to increase this time from 5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 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? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

You also might like to journal what was discovered and spoken about at the end of this time.

MEMORIZE || WEEK 13

Option A: Matthew 6:33-34

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Option B: MATTHEW 6:25-34

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 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? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.



Reflecting on the text

Matthew 7:1-6

It's not unusual to hear people make degrading and dehumanizing comments about others. Jesus, here, makes clear that this should not be so with His followers. We are not to consider ourselves better than and condemn and demean others, but are to be gracious and lift them up. Jesus himself followed this admonition ("*... for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world*" Jn 12:47) and not judging is of such importance, that just as He did regarding forgiveness (Mt 6:14-15), Jesus links how we treat others with how God will treat us: "*Do not judge, or you too will be judged.*"

Importantly, arrogant judging is different than being discerning, for instance about whether someone is telling the truth or has another's best interest at heart. Such discernment is actually desirable: "*I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*" (Mt. 10:16).

Instead of self-righteous judgment of others, we are to be humbly self-aware. The exaggerated speck *versus* log comparison does not say that my faults are worse than everyone else's, but conveys that my primary responsibility is to be aware of and work on my faults, not those of others. Another truth conveyed is that "*taking the log out of my own eye*" not only benefits me, but allows me to much more effectively help others find wholeness (i.e. to "*see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye*").

In verse 6, Jesus creates a vivid picture that some people have such disregard for holy or precious things that they tear them apart like a wild dog would a hunk of meat or a person, or trample them like a pig would a pearl. He then makes clear that even though we are not to judge (i.e. condemn) such people, we are to be discerning and not give such people access to destroy precious things in our care, including our own well-being. Many commentaries apply this to being

discerning about how and with whom we share the gospel, knowing that many will reject it and even attack the messenger. Others also point out a connection to verse 5, and the need to be mindful about how and to whom we offer reproof and help.

Overall, Jesus is saying that as citizens of God's kingdom, we're missing the mark when we think of ourselves as more important than others and put ourselves in the position of God, passing judgment on others, condemning them in our hearts, and discounting their value. Instead of being self-righteous, we must be aware of our own shortcomings and need for God's grace. Then, the more we grow in faith and wisdom, and admit and address our shortcomings, the more we can come alongside others who are receptive and support them as they work to grow in faith and godliness.

-Andy Karplus-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (10 minutes)

(Note: As this is a longer passage, it is helpful to increase this time from 5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 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? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? 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. 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.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,

MEMORIZE || WEEK 14

Option A: Matthew 7:1-2

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

Option B: MATTHEW 7:1-6

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 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? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 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. 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.



WEEK FIFTEEN

MATTHEW 7:7-11

SUNDAY MESSAGE NOTES

Sunday, April 27

SCRIPT YOUR FLIP || MATTHEW 7:7-11

- This week, what are you tempted to believe that isn't true?
- From this text, what do you need to believe is true?
- During the week, take time to revisit your script and ask yourself questions about it, look up other scripture about it, perhaps write a prayer out to God around it.

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 7:7-11

PRAY, PRAY, PRAY! Recall that in Chapter 6 of Matthew, Jesus taught His disciples, and us, not to be hypocrites or babble like pagans when we pray. He gave us a model of prayer to use when we come to the Father in prayer. Now in Mt. 7:7-11 He implores us to pray--actually, commands us to pray--that we might receive good gifts from God, our Father in heaven.

Jesus begins this teaching using three verbs, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and the door will be open to you. The repetition is important. It is like He is saying: Pray to your Father for what you need, it will be given to you. Pray to the Father for what you seek, you will find it. Pray to the Father to open the door of wisdom and discernment, it will be open to you. Then Jesus makes the invitation universal and the attending promises available to all. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Here we are speaking of *everyone* who is "poor in spirit" and has been adopted into the family of God. Simply put, if Jesus is not our Lord and Savior and God is not our Father, these promises do not apply.

So in verses 7-8, Jesus pleads with us to ask, seek, and knock that we may know and experience the good favor of God. In verses 9-11, Jesus teaches us that our heavenly Father is far better than our earthly father. Even though our earthly father is inclined to give good things when we ask, by nature he is evil. That is a powerful word, Jesus is declaring that our earthly fathers, Christian or non-Christian, are evil and thus makes it clear that He believes in the universal sinfulness of human beings. On the other hand, our Father in heaven is a good, good Father, "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6) who delights to do us good. (Jer. 32:4). The point is this, earthly, fallen, selfish fathers still care for their children and desire to do good for them but, our sinless,

holy Father is always better, "how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those" who ask, seek and knock.

Does Jesus teach that every child of God will get everything asked for, when it is asked for, in the way it is ask for? NO! God gives us only good gifts in the right time and the right way. Meaning that if we in ignorance ask for a stone to eat or a poisonous viper to play with, He will not grant that request. Have you ever asked for, even pleaded with God for something you REALLY wanted that you did not receive? Only to find some time later, maybe years later, that you totally understood that had your prayer been answered at that time it would not have been a "good gift"? God, our heavenly Father, knows just what we need and when we need it. Praise God! He wisely and mercifully saves us from our own ignorance.

-Don Snow-

LECTIO DIVINA || MATTHEW 7:7-11

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (10 minutes)

(Note: As this is a longer passage, it is helpful to increase this time from 5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?

Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step.

God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

MEMORIZE || WEEK 15

Option A: Matthew 7:7-8

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Option B: MATTHEW 7:7-11

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

WEEK 16

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 7:12

A lot of us grew up hearing the “Golden Rule.” I remember seeing it on a bright happy poster in my elementary school teacher's classroom. “Treat others like you want to be treated” became the automatic comeback anytime we got a little too rowdy with each other as 7 and 8 year olds. Back then, it was easy to mock our teachers and brush it off as “kid stuff.” But here, in adulthood—and especially in the tough situations of life—I’m learning just how much depth Jesus was calling us into with these words recorded in this passage.

Spoiler alert: He’s not just asking us to be nice.

The idea of the Golden Rule has been around for awhile, usually brought up in situations where someone is asked to not do wrong to someone else. However, Jesus did not say, “Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you;” rather, He said, essentially, “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, DO also to them.” It’s active. When Jesus gives us this command, it isn't a suggestion to simply stay polite; it is a radical call to love like God loves. Jesus is challenging us to stop living from a “what’s-in-it-for-me” perspective and start living in a sacrificial way that goes against most social norms.

It doesn’t let us hide away, living life without connection with others so we can say we “did no harm” to them. Instead, Jesus flips the script of what we know and calls us to go beyond avoiding mistakes to taking intentional steps toward showing love. It’s not about not stealing—it’s about going out of our way to give. It’s not enough to avoid conflict with someone; rather, He calls us to reach out and engage in the community around us, even if we’re the ones thinking someone should reach out to us first. Jesus shows us that the love he wants us to have isn’t passive; it’s active, daring, and full of grace.

So, here's the bottom line: Jesus' way is better, not because it's easy or it's what the culture thinks is right, but because it's transformative. Every time we choose to live by this rule, we're aligning ourselves with God's heart. It's no small thing that Jesus said immediately after the Golden Rule, "...for this is the Law and the Prophets." Living by this rule will help point us directly to Jesus and we can step into a way of life that is full, connected, and abundantly loving.

And no, we won't be perfect in living in it sometimes (often, if you're anything like me). But in striving to live by this command of Jesus, we will come to see the power of a life shaped by love, forgiveness, and compassion. Jesus knew that living this way isn't always easy, most things He calls us into aren't, but it's always worth it. His way frees us, heals relationships, and fills our lives with the beauty of His love—one imperfect day at a time.

-Lexie Miller-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (10 minutes)

(Note: As this is a longer passage, it is helpful to increase this time from 5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them,
for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

MEMORIZE || WEEK 16

Option A: MATTHEW 7:12

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Option B: MATTHEW 7:12

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

WEEK 17

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 7:13-14

How do I find the “narrow gate”? In Matthew 7:13-27, Jesus speaks what I believe are some of the most sobering (and terrifying) words ever uttered. Why? Because it is God Himself who says these things (John 1, Hebrews 1:3, Colossians 1:15-23). That makes me stop dead in my tracks.

One thing I observed in Matthew 7 is that Jesus mentions three “locations” that people are entering. The first is what He calls “Destruction” (7:13), the second is what He calls “Life” (7:14), and the third is what He calls “the kingdom of heaven” (7:21). Another observation, specific to Matthew 7:13-14, is that Jesus associates the wide and easy way with “destruction,” and the narrow and hard way with “life.” So, there seems to be connections between those things, albeit I still have questions as to what exactly Jesus means by “easy” and “hard.” Yet another observation from this passage is that Jesus says that “many” will enter the gate leading to destruction, while “few” will enter the gate leading to life...more connections.

As I read hard passages like this (including Matthew 7:15-27) what follows next in my mind is a series of questions that looks something like this:

How do I find the narrow gate that leads to life?

How do I avoid the gate that leads to destruction?

If many are entering the wide and easy gate, am I on that same path?

Lord, when I meet You face to face, are You going to declare to me to depart from Your presence?

Lord Jesus, have mercy on me - how can I possibly know the way?

Thankfully, I am not the only one who has ever asked this question, and I believe that the very fact these words spark fear in me is actually

a *good sign*. It means my spiritual compass is working, that my heart is responding correctly when faced with Jesus' hard words. And in His mercy, the Lord Jesus graciously brings more of His promises to mind.

To be concise: *Jesus is the Way*.

In John 14:5, the apostle Thomas says to Jesus, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" And how does Jesus respond? Does He respond with "Do this and that, and *that* is how you enter the narrow gate!"?

No! ***Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** Do I *know* the Lord Jesus, or do I just know *about* Him? Have I looked upon the Son of God and believed in Him? Or have I been busying myself with tasks that only make it *appear* that I've done so? Jesus' friends enter by the narrow gate. For the way is hard and narrow that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

-Mike Allen-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (10 minutes)

(Note: As this is a longer passage, it is helpful to increase this time from 5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“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. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

MEMORIZE || WEEK 17

Option A: MATTHEW 7:13-14

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. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Option B: MATTHEW 7:13-14

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. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

WEEK 18

Reflecting on the text

Matthew 7:15-20

In this passage, Jesus continues to elaborate on the theme he introduced in verses 13 and 14, stating that there is one narrow gate and one hard way that leads to life, while the gate to destruction is wide and the path that leads there is easy. Of course, Jesus is the only way that leads to life (John 14:6, Acts 4:12) and all other gates, paths, and ways ultimately lead to destruction.

Having explained this, Jesus now warns his followers that false prophets will come and distort his clear message that salvation is through him alone, using the term “beware” because to identify them we will need to be on alert; for on the outside they will appear harmless (at best) or attractive (at worst). Both Jesus and the apostles repeat this warning (see Matthew 24:11, Luke 6:26, 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1). Beyond their appearance though, these false prophets are inwardly “ravenous wolves”, eager for the gratification that comes through the deception and manipulation of unsuspecting souls, ultimately leading them down the road to destruction mentioned in verse 13.

Jesus then points us to a means of identification, the prophet’s litmus test: their fruit. In the agrarian society of 1st-century Palestine, people knew where their food came from; they could look at a plant and know what fruit it would produce, and vice-versa, they could look at a piece of fruit and know what kind of plant produced it. Good plants produce good fruit (grapes and figs) bad plants produce bad fruit (thorns and thistles). So too, we must look at the fruit, the produce, the outworking of a so-called prophet’s teaching and way of life and to determine if it aligns with Jesus’ own teaching and the teaching of his apostles.

First, is the word that the prophet is speaking true (Deut. 18:20-22, 1 John 4:1, 1 Thess. 5:20-21)? Fortunately, we have the 66 books of the Bible to screen a prophet's word against to determine its veracity.

Second, does the prophet's teaching point us to Jesus and obedience to his word (John 14:15, Heb. 1:1-4, Rev. 19:10) or to something else, perhaps the gain or status of the prophet (Phil. 3:18-19)?

Third, is the prophet's way of life and implication of their teaching in line with what proceeds from God's Spirit or not (Galatians 5:19-24)?

Why does any of this matter? Because trees not bearing good fruit are cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 7:19), a warning repeated often in various ways throughout the New Testament (Matt. 3:10, 18:8-9, John 15:6, Heb. 6:1-8, Rev. 20:14-15). It is making clear that it is not only the false prophets but any who follow their false ways that are liable to destruction in Hell.

Praise God that we have Jesus' word, and the tested word of his prophets (2 Peter 1:19), including the warnings, to make us "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. 3:14-17), ensuring that we follow truth, avoiding error and those who proclaim it.

-Jeff & Tana DeRoss-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (10 minutes)

(Note: As this is a longer passage, it is helpful to increase this time from 5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don’t rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

MEMORIZE || WEEK 18

Option A: Matthew 7:15-16

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles

Option B: MATTHEW 7:15-20

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.



Reflecting on the text

Matthew 7:21-23

On Judgment Day, how would you answer Jesus if He asked, “Why should I let you into Heaven?” There are only two ways to answer this question, and in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus paints a clear picture of the differences between the two.

In Matthew chapter 7 Jesus contrasts several pairs of opposites. There are two gates and two roads (v.13-14), two kinds of prophets which bear two kinds of fruit (v.15-20), and two foundations on which to build our lives (v.24-27). These are all related to God’s Kingdom, and Jesus uses them all to illustrate a singular point: that there is only one true way to Heaven. And perhaps an even more sobering truth in verses 21-23, that there will be some who claim to have found it but didn’t.

We must be careful in trying to correctly understand such a serious warning. On one hand, Jesus does not mince words, and He wants to shake the self-righteous out of their false sense of security. But Jesus also does not want His true disciples to live in constant fear that they are not good enough or that they will devote their lives to Him, only to be turned away in the end.

The key is to understand what Jesus means when He says “Only the one who does the will of My Father” will enter into heaven. What is the will of the Father? Jesus did not leave us to wonder about this, saying “The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent” (John 6:28-29), and the apostle John reiterates this, saying “This is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 3:23).

The apostle Paul summarized the good news of Jesus in this way: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). The clear teaching of scripture is that the

only way to Heaven is by grace—an undeserved gift—through faith in Jesus.

Jesus was addressing the way the Pharisees thought in these verses—a people that were trying to justify themselves through their works and external behaviors, while their hearts were far from God Himself. Even spiritual power can be a misleading sign of allegiance (see Exodus 7).

Hopefully, the two options we have to answer Jesus' question are now clear. Would you dare boast about your outward works and all you have done for Jesus on judgment day? Or, are you increasingly aware of your own sinfulness and inward need of forgiveness, and on that day will instead through tears only thank Him for all that He has done for you?

If you answered the second way, then fear not—Jesus paid the debt for you and welcomes you into His Kingdom!

To those who would answer the first way, Jesus gives a warning. They use the phrase “Lord, Lord” (a repeated name in that culture communicates personal affection and intimacy—see how the Lord repeats names when he says “Abraham, Abraham” (Gen. 22:11), “Moses, Moses” (Ex. 3:4), Samuel, Samuel” (1 Sam. 3:10), Martha, Martha” (Luke 10:41), “Saul, Saul” (Acts 9:4), and “Simon, Simon” (Luke 22:31)). Those who are relying on their own works to justify themselves before God are claiming a false intimacy when they are still ultimately depending on themselves for salvation - and to them, Jesus says, “I never knew you.” The issue is not whether we know Jesus, but whether He knows us. And all it takes for Him to know us, is for us to believe in Him for the mercy and forgiveness we crave. Praise be to God that He has done everything for us, so there is nothing left to do but rest in His love and grace and connect intimately and walk with Him!

-Caleb Hunt-

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (10 minutes)

(Note: As this is a longer passage, it is helpful to increase this time from 5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.’ ”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil."

MEMORIZE || WEEK 19

Option A: Matthew 7:21

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Option B: MATTHEW 7:21-23

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.'



Reflecting on the text

Matthew 7:24-27

This passage from Jesus is a remarkable conclusion to a remarkable set of teachings that challenged the accepted “truths” of the day and introduced a new perspective on how to live life for the multitudes that gathered to hear Him speak. Two thousand years later, Jesus’ teaching is just as applicable and relevant for our lives – and serves as a critical anchor in a swirling sea of self-righteousness, half-truths, and worldly falsehoods.

In this concluding passage, Jesus teaches that those who hear *and* follow His teachings will build a solid foundation for their lives – they are wise. When we follow Jesus, we can weather any storm. Our difficulties will not bring down our house because we are built on bedrock. We have wisdom because we are following the will and heart of Jesus for our lives.

Jesus contrasts the wise person with the idea of the fool, who builds his house on sand. While a house built on sand may stand for a little while, it will not stand up during true trials – the lashing, sideways rains and hurricane-force winds of life. In His analogy, Jesus likens our disobedience and disregard of His teachings to a flimsy foundation – and the ultimate outcome is that we will find our world collapsing around us. How many times have we tried to do things on our own, trusted in our own understanding, went our own way, only to reach dead ends, standing in the midst of the raging storm, exposed to the elements?

But we know that trusting in our own thinking and ways is foolish because it is God – not us – that is in control of everything. God’s foundation allows us to navigate difficult things. We are wise to trust God because there is nothing of our own doing or understanding that can save us – only God can do that. And not only is God in control, but when we allow Him to act as the bedrock in our lives by placing our trust in Him, it allows Him to work in truly miraculous ways that point us, and the world around us, back to Him and His holiness. It builds our character. It strengthens our faith. And it allows our lives to be a

testimony to the goodness and loving kindness of a true Father who loves us more than we can know. A wise person is deeply rooted and rests in the solid foundation of God's promises. In Colossians 2:7, we read "Let your roots grow down into Him, and let your lives be built on Him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness."

Another way to think about this is our role as pupil, student, learner – there is much that we don't know. Jesus is teaching His followers that He knows what is good for us, and He is instructing us so that we can walk a path that allows us to center God in our lives, in all parts of our lives and in our daily living. Following Jesus' teachings results in a true transformation in our attitudes, beliefs, and actions throughout our day-to-day.

It is no mistake that Jesus ends His most famous sermon with this teaching. This concluding word is a call to action; we must listen to what Jesus is saying and we also must obey. Living the principles Jesus has taught – of turning the other cheek, of humbling ourselves, of forgiving and loving our enemies, of trusting in God – not only creates a firm foundation for our faith, but also demonstrates our love of Him through obedience.

In fair weather, our foundations aren't tested. It is when we encounter times of difficulty – the storms of our lives – that our worlds can be brought down around us. But we can rest secure in the promise that if we follow Jesus's teachings, we are protected, for He is our safe refuge, a fortress where our enemies cannot reach us (Psalms 61:3). We may be able to go for a time without tests and trials, but there will come a time when we face torrential downpours and powerful gales. Those times are when it becomes suddenly crystal clear how trustworthy our foundation *actually* is. When the world teaches us to trust ourselves, and that we know best, Jesus is asking us to build our house – our faith, our lives – on the goodness, loving-kindness, and faithfulness of the one true God, who loves us more than we can comprehend.

-Jill Childress-

LECTIO DIVINA || MATTHEW 7:24-27

Step 1: Prepare

Ask God to meet you here, to speak with you personally through His scripture. As we seek Him, He promises that He will be found by us.

Trust that He has a word for you and be ready to listen.

Take several deep breaths.

Sit comfortably.

Perhaps light a candle.

Invite God into this space.

Step 2: Lectio (10 minutes)

(Note: As this is a longer passage, it is helpful to increase this time from 5 minutes)

Now, read the passage slowly.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 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. 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. 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.”

Read it again. And again. There is no prescribed number of times, just whatever is needed for you.

Step 3: Meditatio (5 minutes)

By now, a certain word or phrase has become noticeable to you, something that the Holy Spirit is drawing your mind to. Pay attention to it. Chew on it. Roll it around in your mind. What does it mean? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Don't rush through this step. God may settle on one particular area first, and then bring something else to your mind. Keep this slow.

Step 4: Oratio (10 minutes)

Having read and meditated, we move into Oratio, the time of prayer. Now it is time to ask God what this all means, to work through it with Him. We ask Him, "What are you inviting me into? What call do you have for me? What change do you have for me? What are you showing me about yourself? What are you telling me about who I am to you?" There will be an inner dialogue here. Sometimes silent, sometimes speaking.

Step 5: Contemplatio (5 minutes)

This fourth step is one of inner quietness. Here we quiet our minds and body and just rest in God's love. Lift your heart up to God, not because you desire His gifts, but because you desire HIM. Focus completely on Him, rest in Him, be silent with Him.

After this rest, it may be helpful to end your time with The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13.

"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,

MEMORIZE || WEEK 20

Option A: Matthew 7:24-25

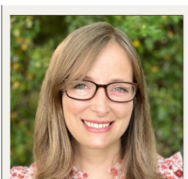
Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

Option B: MATTHEW 7:24-27

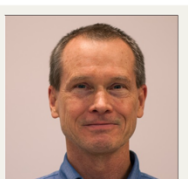
Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 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.

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

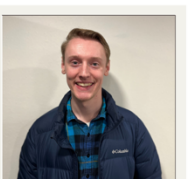




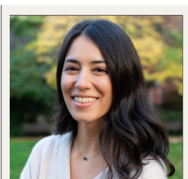
Wendy Evans



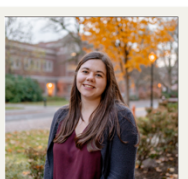
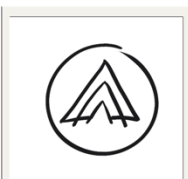
Paul Berg



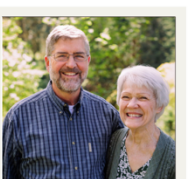
Jacob Mills



Emma Allen



Jeanie Stouffer



Steve Biornstad



Clay Donne



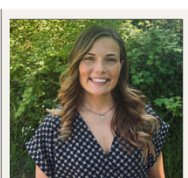
Jon Evans



Natalie Morse



Rachel Ebert



Stacie Fulcher



Andy Karplus



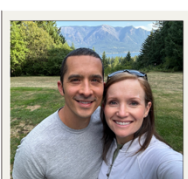
Don Snow



Lexie Miller



Mike Allen



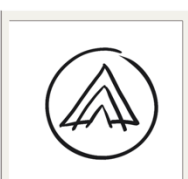
Jeff & Tana DeRoss



Caleb Hunt



Jill Childress



INTRODUCING OUR WRITERS!

Memorize || Sermon on the Mount

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, His disciples came to Him.

And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

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

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

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

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

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You are the salt of the earth, but 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.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 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. 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.

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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of

heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 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. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 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. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 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. 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.

It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. 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.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as

well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. 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.

Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 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.

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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then like this:

'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.'

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

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. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 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!

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.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 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? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive

and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 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? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 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.

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.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

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. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good

fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 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. 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. 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."

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.