



# **Sermon on the Mount**

**Six Bible studies from Matthew  
to help you live in God's Kingdom.**

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## Bible Studies in this series

<p><b>Creation and Fall</b> – 6 studies to look at the creation and fall of mankind. We will look at the perfection and plan of God’s creation and how man tarnished the creation with sin.</p>	<p><b>Jesus’ Miracles in John’s Gospel</b> – 7 studies on the miracles of Jesus in the gospel of John. Each miracle has a meaning that tells us something important about Jesus’ person and ministry.</p>
<p><b>Noah: Man and Mission</b> – 6 studies on the Flood. We will see the grace of God and the obedience and trust of Noah. God makes a new beginning in a fallen world.</p>	<p><b>Jesus’ parables in Luke</b> – 6 studies on the parables of Jesus in Luke. We will look at the meaning behind some of these familiar parables and see patterns for our lives.</p>
<p><b>Storm Shelter Psalms</b> – 6 studies on some of the psalms to turn to when life hits you hard. Wrestle with the psalmist as he learns to trust the Lord in difficult times.</p>	<p><b>Upper Room Conversations</b> – 6 studies on the conversation that Jesus had with the disciples around the last supper table. Learn what was so important to Jesus that He just had to share it with the disciples.</p>
<p><b>Revival in Nehemiah</b> – 6 studies on the second half of Nehemiah. The walls were rebuilt. Now it was time to rebuild a people who was down and distant from the Lord.</p>	<p><b>Galatians: Rules versus Grace</b> – 6 studies with Paul in the heart of the gospel. In an age when people want to force us to follow their rules, Paul wants us to see the power of grace.</p>
<p><b>Daniel: Godly Living in a Pagan World</b> – 6 studies to encourage us as we live in a world that has become harsh to God. It will make all the difference to keep our faith in tough times.</p>	<p><b>Paul’s first missionary journey</b> – 6 studies on the conversion and first journey of Paul. See Paul as he grows and learn what the life of the Christian was meant to be.</p>
<p><b>Power of Prayer</b> – 6 studies on the power and help that we receive in prayer. Follow the saints in their prayers and learn from them how valuable prayer can be for you.</p>	<p><b>Sermon on the Mount</b> – 6 studies on the three chapter sermon in Matthew to help you understand what it means to live in God’s Kingdom.</p>

## Introduction

Sit down with Jesus and learn what it means to live in God's kingdom. Everyone is welcome as Jesus shows what is possible for saints who are willing to embrace Him and use His power in their lives. Those who listen to Him are blessed, for they will grow their relationship with Jesus and be a blessing to the world around them as they bring Jesus to their world so He may change that world with His love. This relationship is built on the worship of the Lord. Drawing close to Jesus, we change our view of ourselves and the world around us. We see how generous our Lord has been to us and our opportunities to be helpful to others because of all that the Lord has given us. The Sermon on the Mount is about the potential for what the Christian life can be in Jesus. It is not a series of rules but a joyful lifestyle built on a relationship and understanding of the Lord and applied to our everyday lives. Live as Jesus outlines in these three chapters, and life will be exciting and powerful.

Faith is more than the gateway to eternal life. It brings blessings and changes the course of our lives. We are blessed because Jesus is near us, filling our lives and making us a blessing to those around us. As blessed people, we are the salt that influences the world around us. The values and character of our lives flavor our communities. People see how Christians are different because of the closeness that we have to God and the daily honor that we give Him in worship. They see it in how we deal with problems. While the world worries about every detail in life, we trust the Lord and bring our concerns to Him in worship and prayer. Our trust in the Lord changes our outlook on life. Instead of being filled with worry and selfishness, we can be generous and call upon the Lord to be generous to others for all the gifts he brings to our lives. All of those things make us different than the world and help us see the truth so that we live in Christ.

The challenge for most Christians is to choose to live as Jesus teaches rather than live as the world calls us to live. Will we choose to live daily with Jesus so that our lives are filled with His blessings? Many want the mercy of God while choosing to live the ways of the world. Will we doom others because we keep the gifts of the Lord to ourselves, or will we be generous with our influence and resources? God's people let the Lord enter their lives with weekly worship, daily study, and prayer, and they share what they have learned with others. They want a new life and know that the Lord is eager to give them and others such a life. They are tired of the worries of the world and want to grow in their trust and devotion to the Lord. They will be changed, but only if they immerse themselves in a deep relationship with the Lord. Follow the words of the Sermon on the Mount, and you will be different, and your life will impact the world around you.

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## **How to use this Bible study**

Each of the six chapters contains an introduction to help you get the big picture and is followed by thirteen questions to help you dig into the truth. The questions will help you understand what is going on and apply it to your own lives. The leader's guide provides answers for the questions that can be used in a Sunday Bible class or a small group. In a small group setting, you may find it helpful to copy the four-page leader's guide for each person. In a large setting, it may be easier to copy the student guides provided in the back of the book so that each of the members of the class has a student guide for personal use. The leader guide could then be used by the teacher to guide the discussion. Notice that there are also three questions at the end of each lesson that can either be discussed as you meet together or assigned for people to think about in the coming week.

My prayer is that you and the members of your group or class can grow through these studies. The answers in the leader's guide may challenge you to find deeper meaning and application for your lives. Often we try to overcome problems in life by ourselves. The goal of this study is to help you understand the deeper meanings behind each of Jesus' miracles in the gospel of John so that you might have the full power of Jesus in your life. Each miracle is done in a particular way and time so that those He healed received more than just healing or help. Often we want Jesus' help and want the pain to end quickly. Realize that Jesus may want to use our pain to teach us or to bring us blessings that we have not even thought about. Let these studies guide you into deeper truths about your Lord. As you study, realize that many of the questions have no single answer but are meant to help people find God's help in your trials. If you need to take more than one week per lessons, do so and enjoy the discussion and the learning. The miracles of Jesus are worth more than just a passing glance.

### **Bibliography**

Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series)  
Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew  
Life Application Study Bible.  
New American Commentary  
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The Expositor's Bible

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May the Lord bless you as you learn and grow in His grace.

**1. Transform your character**  
**Matt. 5: 1-12**  
**Blessed by Jesus to be a blessing to others.**

Jesus has been in ministry for about a year by the time of the Sermon on the Mount. He has been tempted by Satan, healed many, and chosen disciples. The Beatitudes describe what it means to be a part of Jesus' kingdom. We are blessed by Jesus so that we can be helpers with others in the world. God wants us to depend on Him and follow the pattern of life that He offers. Blessed are those who are so poor in spirit that they realize that they need Jesus. Blessed are those who mourn their sinfulness and the state of the world around them, for Jesus will restore their lives. Blessed are those who are humble and trust God looking to Him for answers. They will receive what they need. Only those who are strengthened and prepared by Jesus will be able to act on His behalf. They will change the world by showing mercy and living with Godly character. They will bring peace to a troubled world. They will face persecution for their acts of love, but God will be there to help. In these words, Jesus shows who the disciples will become and the power they will receive to help those around them.

Jesus is among us to build us up and to encourage us to serve in His name. Like the disciples, we must have a burning desire to sit at Jesus' feet and learn, knowing that He will encourage us and comfort us when we see our failures and the failures of the world. As we are with Jesus, our Lord will change our character and provide the answers we seek in life. He will build us up, but He builds us up for a purpose. We are His servants and ambassadors in a world that needs His help. We will repair broken relationships with His mercy. We will show the Lord by the scope of our lives and bring calm to a troubled world. We will cling to the Lord so much that we will be different from the world. It may cause us pain and persecution, but we will love the Lord so much that we will never leave Him and can't be like the world instead of like Him. We will be changed by Jesus so that we can change our world.

We all have to make choices in life like the people seated before Jesus as He preached the Sermon on the Mount. As we need to choose the depth of our involvement with Jesus, we need to remember three things. First, we will gain more by being with Jesus than others will gain by keeping their distance from Him. Others will struggle while we will have Jesus to help us with answers and power. Second, we will have a purpose and value that others still need to include. As we serve as His representatives in the world, we know how we are to help others. We will be less likely to stumble through life and more likely to have a path that brings us and others blessings. Finally, we have a value that others will miss. Drawing close to Jesus, I am a better person, father, and friend. I have worth from the cross of Jesus and will be valuable to others because of the work that Jesus will do through me. Jesus blesses me to be a blessing to others. The Sermon on the Mount shows me some of the ways that Jesus helps me and how I can help others.

**1. If you had a chance to sit with Jesus today, what would you want to learn from Him?**

We do have an opportunity to sit with Jesus. It is called Bible study and prayer. I want you to take that one step further and imagine yourself sitting in front of Jesus during one of the many times He taught people, as He did here during the Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps, you have a specific question to ask, like "Why did someone you love have to get sick" or "Why did I lose my job?" You might have other questions like "Can you help me learn to be patient or to share my faith better?" I picture people listening to Jesus and finding that He often answered their questions without even voicing them. Discuss as a group what you might want to ask Jesus or what topic you wish He would speak about. If you know of a passage that speaks to another person's needs, please share it.

**Read Matt. 5: 1-12**

## **2. Verse 4 What grieves you about the world and yourself? How will Jesus help you in your need?**

We are blessed if we recognize our sinfulness and the grief it causes us. Many deny the tragedy of sin. They write off evil as something natural in the world and themselves. The disciple is blessed because he recognizes sin and seeks out Jesus for forgiveness and restoration when sin destroys our lives. Unlike many around us, the Christian is bothered by the evil in the world. Racial inequality and civil violence bother us. We hate the battles of politicians and the relationships destroyed by divorce or greed. God comforts us in His word. He helps us see how evil will not triumph but will face punishment, and He allows us to comfort others with His truth and His power for healing. The Christian receives hope that the world doesn't have because we have Jesus and know He will triumph.

## **3. Verse 4. What do people in the world try to take comfort with?**

Ever been to the funeral of a non-Christian? People comfort themselves with pithy sayings or the fact that this was a good man or woman. In conversation, people talk about the evil all around us as if it is natural and that somehow riots or divorces will bring good instead of the harm that we see repeatedly. Man doesn't have the resources to overcome the world's sadness, so they live in a world filled with denial and false hopes. They think that things will magically get better when personal experience shows that is typically not true. It is a real blessing to belong to a Lord who can overcome sin and its effects and bring us real peace and hope in a troubled world.

## **4. Verse 5 What do you think it means to be meek? How will they inherit the world compared to the strong?**

The word used here for meek occurs only four times in scripture and can be translated as "gentle." The meek are those who are humble and trust in the Lord rather than being selfish or pushy. Such people serve others rather than trying to dominate others for their purposes. While people cheer when a bully falls from grace, meek people find that others support them in their needs because they have supported others. They inherit the world as their group of friends and acquaintances grow, and they have a larger-than-life influence on the people and world around them. Those who are dominant seem to have control for a time, but it is the meek who will have the strong families and great friends that self-centered people never seem to have. As meek people live in the character of the Lord, they will find joy in life that others never seem to have.

## **5. Verse 6. What can those who have questions expect from the Lord?**

The crowds came to Jesus when their hearts were broken and empty, and He provided answers. There is a hunger for answers that made people in Jesus' day put aside their daily tasks and travel miles and sit for hours listening to the amazing things that He said. He would unfold the meaning of the Old Testament and apply its truths to their lives in ways that made them hunger and thirst for more. The Pharisees and Sadducees thought that they had the answers, but it was Jesus who people flocked to see. It is much the same today. Those who struggle in life and feel empty need to come to Jesus in worship and the study of His Bible. They will find that He will fill them up and help them understand how to live and thrive. They will find answers to the problems of life and encouragement when life gets too hard or heavy. They will find the friend that they have been looking for. He will fill our deepest hunger.

## **6. Verse 6. Why is it important to never be satisfied with what you know about God? How do God's answers fill our deepest needs?**

One of the great ironies is that the more Jesus fills you, the more you will want. Even the greatest saints continued to grow. It was what made them great. There is a deeper knowledge and greater intimacy with the Lord in the later writings of St. Paul or Martin Luther than in their earlier writings. For example, Romans has greater depth than Galatians, which Paul wrote earlier. The weakness today of many Christians is that they have lost the hunger for God's word. They think that they have learned all that they



need. It leaves them as spiritual infants and harms them as they face temptations and challenges that only a mature faith can handle. Those who are hungry for God's word will find that He is always preparing them for the challenges they will face next month or next year. He will get them ready if they continue to learn from Him. The satisfied face problems with inadequate faith. The hungry are filled with God's truth and can overcome the world.

**7. Verse 7. What are the blessings of being a forgiving person? How does this run counter to our world?**

When we are merciful, we will find that people are compassionate to us. A person who constantly judges people will find that people are more judgmental of them. As they find fault with everything that others do, others will look for and point out their flaws. Living in the kingdom of God and His mercy is a blessing. We have the opportunity to forgive as we have been forgiven and to lift people when they fall. We become an extension of Jesus and can exercise the gift of forgiveness, which He gives to all His disciples to share (John 20:23). Our world is often like the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They judge others while missing their weaknesses. They do so to control people or to make themselves feel better because they know their faults all too well. Christians have the joy of forgiving and lifting the burdens off the shoulders of others because they understand the power of mercy.

**8. Verse 7. Why are those who have received mercy the best people to give God's mercy away?**

Christians have experienced the forgiveness and relief of mercy. They know how much it has changed their lives to have sin taken away and not have to worry about every mistake they make. Their self-worth is not in being right or pressing their advantage. Their worth comes from the words of Jesus and the cross where Jesus died. It is that joy of being forgiven that motivates us to want others to experience the same happiness. We share with others what we have experienced firsthand ourselves. We tell others how Jesus has changed our lives and lifted our burdens. A non-Christian or even many weak Christians can't share what they have not fully experienced. Only those who have felt God's forgiveness will be as merciful to others as God has been to them. They give what they have received from Jesus.

**9. Verse 8. Why is purity necessary if we are to represent God? How does purity allow us to be closer to the Lord?**

The impure will never be able to show the character of a holy and righteous God. When our character and values match those of God, we will be a light to the world. In our actions and words, people will see the unseen God. We have committed ourselves to God and His ways. When a Christian commits a terrible sin, the world mocks God because His people are just like everyone else. When a Christian is humble, kind, patient, and loving, people are drawn to them and God because they want to be with a God who cares about them and not just Himself. Purity allows us to see God and get close to Him. As we look at King David in the Old Testament, we see someone very close to God but whose sins drove a wedge between him and God when sin had the upper hand. Those who are pure will see God working in their lives and will not have a veil of wickedness that separates them from God and makes it hard to see His working in the world.

**10. How will your purity affect the world, especially those closest to you?**

The pure will bring God's blessings into the world around them. They will be people whose lives change their children and their friends. They will be the ones others seek advice from and lean on for help. The pure put the message of the Bible into practice and live the qualities of a loving God. Whole communities are changed by one person who dares to live a Godly life when the world around them is falling apart. Just as they see God, others will see God through them and learn God's ways and become Godlier in their lives as well. The light of God is powerful when it shines in the heart of a Christian and brings that light into the lives of those around them.

**11. Verse 11. Why is it a good thing if we are persecuted? What does this truth say about our choices in life?**

Persecution often means that you are following God and not the world. You live differently than the people around you. That may mean that people don't understand you and may even envy you for the joy and love that fills your life. The early church faced persecution because they would not worship the gods of the Romans or give in to the sinful lifestyle of those around them. They were different, and that was a problem. Our choices in life are based on the teachings of Jesus. We believe His ways are best for us and those we love. Those character choices are not the ones that the world around us values, so we find ourselves in this constant friction with the world around us. If you are feeling that friction, it is a good thing, for it means you are following Jesus and not the world.

**12. What would it take not to be persecuted? Why would that be a disaster for the Christian?**

The simple way to not face persecution is to become more like the world. When the church is only mildly like Jesus, it faces less persecution. It focuses on the love and acceptance of Jesus rather than balancing that with His moral directives or His desire that we all live in service to others. The church gets watered down, accepting the things that will not insult society and pushing things that the culture values into their concept of Jesus. It is a disaster for us because we throw away the real Jesus. We leave His ideas of what it means to be a Christian and what is right or wrong and exchange those values for the world's values. Such values do not work and bring only sadness and emptiness. Give away Jesus, and you have nothing. You live without His blessings and will find that the life you have adopted will not stand life's troubles. Without authentic discipleship, life becomes empty and has no purpose.

**13. Why is being blessed by Jesus and being a blessing to others the best choice you can make in life?**

The disciple gains more than the world can ever have. Remember the feeling that you first had as a new Christian if you are a convert. A whole new world was opening up for you. You have a Savior and friend who teaches you and walks with you so that you have an advantage compared to others who have to go it alone. You feel forgiven for the past, and you feel hopeful for the future because Jesus is there. You find a purpose in life as you help others and build new friendships based on the love of Jesus that people in the world will never have. Maybe, most of all, you have a value that non-Christians will never feel. Jesus told you that you are priceless. He died for you on the cross, and He will spend time with you, helping you to grow and be the best person you can be. Others will think only of themselves. You have been blessed by Jesus so that you can be a blessing to others. Never give that up. Being close to Jesus is the best choice you can make for your life and will impact those around you more than you can imagine. You are blessed because you have Jesus.

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 In which of the four blessings (verses 3-6) have you experienced the most progress and satisfaction over the last year of your life?

Deep 2 As you look at the four areas of servant lifestyle (verses 7-10), which would you like to develop during the next year of life?

Deep 3 What is your greatest blessing from being a child of God? Who needs to hear about what God is doing in your life because they need it in theirs?



## **2 Transform my influence**

### **Matt 5:13-16**

#### **Big idea: Christians have the influence to transform their world**

Christian is a verb as well as a noun. It is not only who you are, but it is also what you do. Jesus is showing His followers that they are being given the power to change their world and lead others from darkness. They are not to be like the Pharisees, who are holy for themselves. They are to influence people around them by changing the character of the world and shedding God's light into their world. They do that by flavoring the world. Their values should affect their communities and help people understand how good behavior blesses everyone. They preserve the world from evil, like salt that keeps bacteria from ruining meat in the days without refrigeration. They are light that shows the truth in a world where truth is hard to find. Finally, they are the guide for those lost in the darkness of sin. Jesus wants his people to know that they have the tools to influence the world and should not just sit back and let the world around them struggle.

So what if Christians do not use their influence in the world? What if we sit in our churches and let the world go its own way? That is more than an academic question because the church has often failed to use the impact that it can have in the world. Like worthless salt, we have often been more influenced by the world around us than we flavor the community we live in. We have accepted their values and become useless to their society. They give into evil so that non-Christians don't want to be near God if that is the way His people act. Like darkness, some Christians will remain silent and not provide direction or help when society has lost its way. They refuse to publically do what is correct so that evil can be seen and struggle to exist along with the good of God's people. Finally, Christians who are not light allow their friends to be overtaken by sinful behavior. While people often do not listen to sound advice, Christians still need to warn or help others when people struggle in the darkness. If we don't use our influence, we abandon people to the world that hates them.

God has made us ambassadors of His power so that others see God's ways and are affected positively by our words and lives. When we fail to be salt and light in our world, we doom our world because they don't know a better way. We fail to improve the world that we must live in and shouldn't complain when it seems like everything is worse than it used to be. Our influence from the Lord is meant to be helpful to others and to change the fabric of the world we live in. The disciples lived in a world that was in trouble. Romans were as vile as their gods. The Pharisees and other Jews cared only about their relationship with God and would not lift a finger to help others draw closer to a God who loved them. There are days that we don't like the world we live in, so we must live as Christians so that God can change the world through us. We can be caring and kindly speak the truth rather than just letting evil crush people around us. We can be so Godly that others find it hard to be sinful and selfish around us. The world may have troubles, but the power of God will change others through the life we live.

#### **1. What is one food that isn't the same without salt?**

There are a variety of foods that we routinely salt. I immediately think of popcorn. What is popcorn without butter and salt? You should go light on the butter and salt, but I can't imagine popcorn that is plain without any seasoning. Other foods might be vegetables that need salt or other seasonings. I have known people who salt everything on their plates. Share with the group what you feel is not the same without salt. Discuss what it would be like to be on a salt-free diet because of health. Would that be a big thing for you or no problem at all?

#### **Read Matt 5:13-16**

**2. Verse 13 a. What does it mean that Christians are the salt of the Earth? How do Christians like salt flavor their world?**

Salt flavors our food. It takes the bland and gives it a new character. It takes something unappealing and makes it something that we want to have. Christians are to permeate the values of our society. We flavor the world by encouraging them to have character and kindness through the things we say and do. A Christian known for kindness can bring down the level of hostility in a group and will help others understand what good behavior is. The greater the number of Christians and the more they behave with Godliness, the harder it is for bad behavior to be part of the culture. Our attitudes and values rub off on others, and even those who do not know God are more likely to follow His commandments on stealing, adultery, and anger.

**3. Verse 13a. What flavor is a world when there are no Christians or when Christians are not using their influence?**

When a culture has no Christians, it is hard to have Godly values. The culture becomes rigid with rules or even condones activities like violence against people who do not believe as they do. No one is present to show them what Godly behavior is like. Similar results can happen when Christians are flavored by the world around them more than they flavor the world. Society often promotes sin, and if Christians adapt to the culture's view on greed or sex, they have lost their saltiness and ability to influence their world. Values often go downhill, and people do not see sin as wrong or harmful. In those places, Christians become useless to God. The church is looked down upon by its culture because it is so much like the world rather than helping the world be a better place.

**4. Verse 13b. Salt can preserve food. How do Christians preserve the world that they live in?**

Salt is an excellent preservative. Before refrigerators and freezers, meat was routinely prepared with salt. The salt would keep bacteria from ruining the meat and making it unfit to eat. When the meat was packed in salt, it could last for weeks until it was ready to be used. A group of Christians interspersed in their community will slow down the corruption that evil brings among them. Their actions of kindness and their values make it harder for those who would be cruel or sinful to be successful in their evil actions. They show the truth and set standards for living and relating to others based on scripture and not on man's selfish ways. Christians will make their community a purer and more palatable place to live for themselves, their families, and the others around them.

**5. Verse 13b. What has the world lost if Christians become just as evil as the society they live in?**

Without Christians, humanity has lost its moral compass and lost many of the people who will do what is right without benefit for themselves. Lying, cheating, and adultery have become commonplace. People begin to think that such behavior is normal and acceptable. Our society may protest when women are poorly treated or when corporations steal from customers, but a lack of Christians and God's truth will mean that people don't know what they are supposed to do instead. It is only when moral people are in the habit of doing honest and kind actions that evil is stopped in the world. Like snipers, we pick off evil with kindness so that sin has a harder time looking acceptable in our world. Christians lift a society through Godly behavior and make it uncomfortable for immorality to thrive.

**6. Verse 14. How are Christians the light of the world? What light do they shine?**

Light shows what is present. Without light, you can walk into a room and run into the furniture. Turn on the light, and the truth is immediately apparent. Darkness dissipates amid light. Christians have God's truth from His scripture. While the rest of the world lives in the darkness, trying to guess what will be beneficial in life, Christians let God guide them through situations they have never experienced. We have God's clear commands and the examples of the saints. We can show the world what it means to be a

loving father or a faithful friend. We can use the Ten Commandments and other guidance from God to help people know how to live a fruitful life and what to avoid if they don't want to destroy themselves and others. Our words and actions based on God's wisdom show the world what life should be. They bring light to people wandering through life who stumble over many challenges and may or may not find a good answer by chance.

**7. Verse 14. Without the light of the Lord, what does the world become for its inhabitants?**

Light makes a difference in a person's surroundings. There is fear in the darkness, and one is always afraid of what they might step on or if they are going in the right direction. If Christians are quiet or consent to the crowd in sinful behavior, the light is covered. The wisdom that should be shared as people live in God's truth is missing. Our goal as Christians should be to live out the truth of the Bible with its love and morals so well that people don't even have to read the Bible to know what is right and wrong. They should see through our strong families, good work ethic, and generous lives what the qualities are that give people an advantage and a better future. Through us, they see that God is a loving and wise God who will help people with the many decisions in life. If Christians are not present or are covering their light, the rest of society will wander in the darkness as they try to find the right direction.

**8. Verse 15. How does the light of God through His people guide people in a scary world?**

Jesus says that the light from the scripture shown in the lives of God's people is supposed to be a guide for the world of what is proper and beneficial. On a camping trip, a simple trip to the bathhouse can be a scary adventure without a flashlight. There are roots and uneven pavement to trip over and trees in your way. In the same way, there are many dangers in life that those without the light of God will find dangerous in their path. Some sins seem attractive but will destroy your life and the lives of others. Some attitudes and values can only be found in the words of scripture. If the Christian hides the wisdom they have received from the Lord in their life and never shares it with others, and never acts upon it, the wisdom has no effect. If we live out our faith and God's truth and share that wisdom with others, we bring light to a dark world.

**9. What is the outcome for the world when Christians either refuse to show their light or don't know God's truth enough to share it?**

In the Old Testament, we have good kings and bad. These are times when God's people showed their light and when the light of God was dark. One of the most interesting times to me is when Hezekiah (2 Kings 18f) is very good and is followed by his son Manasseh (2 Kings 21f), who is wicked. The light shines brightly during the time of Hezekiah but is put out during the long reign of Manasseh. The people knew so little about God at the end of Manasseh's reign that the Bible had to be rediscovered by King Josiah (2 Kings 22). The outcome has remained the same today when Christians do not take time to be in the word or to share it with others. The world starts struggling in the darkness, and people do not have the help they need. They will live in darkness and danger. Christians who give up the Lord will find that they face humiliation outside of God's protection as Manasseh did (2 Chronicles 33:10-11) instead of God's help as his father had (2 Chron. 32:20-23). Such blessings or curses from God impact not only the believer but those around him as well.

**10. Verse 16. If Christians live as salt and light, what will be the effect on the people around them?**

There is power in salt and light. Jesus tells us that we can point people to the Lord so that they follow him and praise him. So we not only live in God's wisdom to our benefit and the benefit of those who are part of our family and friends, but we also live in such a way that people see how wonderful our God is. People around us see that what God says works, and so many follow His paths rather than stumbling through the misguided ways of the world. Some even see how God loves and improves our lives and seek out God as their own Lord. As we light the way of truth, we help others see that the ways of our God are

indeed the ways of a happy life. We give glory to our Lord just by following Him so that people can see that God's ways are best.

### **11. What blessings come to the Christian when they have used their influence on behalf of the Lord?**

We often forget that whether the world is good or bad, we still have to live in that world. As we shine in the world, we make it a better place to live. We teach people what a happy life is really like. We show people how sin destroys lives around us. We are mentors that impact others, and soon the people around us start behaving in moral ways. Others start coming to faith, and they become examples of God's righteousness to the people in their circles. Goodness and kindness spread instead of wickedness and evil. The result is a world that is pleasant to live in instead of a world filled with fighting and sinful behavior. We end up being blessed by the people we have influenced for the Lord.

### **12. Why does Jesus believe that Christians will have more influence than other groups?**

The correct information gives the right results. If Christians operate out of the wisdom of God, which has shown itself to be valid for centuries, they will have an advantage over others whose lives are governed by selfish and false ideas. Christians have an advantage that the world doesn't have. The world protests with demonstrations when they believe that they are being mistreated or want the world around them to change. They struggle because they often don't know how to fix the problem, and they do not have the Holy Spirit who can change the hearts of men. It was Christians in Poland that brought down the Communists of Soviet Russia. It was Christians that transformed the Roman Empire. As the people of God live out their faith, they can change the world in a way that no other group can because they are the tools of God, whose wisdom and power are greater than anything here on Earth.

### **13. Christians have influence. What is at stake if Christians do not use their influence for the Lord?**

The church today often isolates itself from the world around it. We become monasteries that try to keep the truth alive inside the walls while allowing the world around us to fall apart. Jesus is advocating that we influence the world around us by publically living our lives for Him and speaking His truth in love. What is at stake is the world that we have to live in. The monasteries of medieval days found themselves attacked and pillaged by bands of villains and armies of knights. Churches today are finding that a hostile world is on the attack and closing churches around the country. If you want a better world, you have to influence it with the salt and light of the Lord. You publically speak your faith to your friends and family. You live out your values even when the world around you doesn't. Little by little, the world will change. More people will become Christian, and the world will see the destructive force of sin for what it is. The world around us needs the answers and values that come only from the Lord. If we don't share those values, we will watch the world fall around us.

### **For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 How trustworthy is the scripture? Why is it the ultimate source of light in the world compared to all the other sources that we could use?

Deep 2 How do believers hide their light? Why would they hide the truth of God under a cover and keep it from others?

Deep 3 What problem of the world leaves a hole in your heart when you hear about it? How could you or your group make a dent in that problem by living out your faith and speaking the truth?

### **3. Real worship**

**Matt 6:1-15**

**Big idea: Worship gives glory to God and blessings to us.**

Worship is something every Christian does, but few appreciate it. The Jews were required to visit the temple for special feasts. It had become their duty. Jesus will teach the crowd about two acts of worship and show the deeper meaning of each. He wants worship to be a time to give glory to God and to be beneficial to us. Jesus begins with a discourse on giving. The Jews routinely dropped thank offerings for those in need into a chest at the temple. Such giving was to be quietly done so they could guard against selfish motives. Unfortunately, the chest had a wide opening that narrowed just before the chest opening. It looked like a trumpet, so if you put the coins in just right, they made a loud rattle down the tube, announcing your generosity. It was not what God desired.

Jesus warned against prayer done just for show. Instead, it was to be an intimate conversation with the Lord that used common words, not flowery words or elaborate formulas. God wants you to speak to Him from the heart. Worship is about honoring God and being blessed by Him.

Worship can be one of the greatest things that happens to you each week and each day. It can change your life, for it is the avenue to building a solid relationship with the Lord. We learn to give because we are confident that the Lord will take care of us. We don't worry about tomorrow because we know that the Lord will provide us with what we need each day. That means I can be generous instead of hoarding what I have. I also give quietly because my giving is not to provide me with glory but to show how I appreciate what the Lord is doing for me. I give because I know that He will continue to provide for me so that I can be a blessing to others. Prayers are private as well. That doesn't mean I should never pray in public. It just means that I don't pray, so others see me and think I am religious. I pray because I want God to hear and help. He is my heavenly Father who listens to my every word. My words are from my heart in my language without having to speak to impress God. Worship is my time to be with God so I can share my heart and let Him build me up.

Worship focused on God has rewards. It is a chance to build a personal relationship with God so that our lives can depend on His power and wisdom. If I am more regular in worship, I am more likely to receive help from God because I am more comfortable in prayer and know what He wants to give me. I will have the courage to ask for miracles and will not get in the way of His help. In His word, I will find answers to my questions and comfort when I am hurting. I will have his values and be generous like He has been generous to me. Life is better when I am in worship because of my connection with the Lord. It gives me an advantage that nothing can take from me. It helps me to have the values and courage to raise my children and to work at my job. I don't worship God to gain His favor. I am the one who benefits the most from worship, for God gives me far more than I can ever give to Him. My time in worship is one of the highlights of life. It is a piece of heaven here on earth.

#### **1. What image do you have when you think of worship? Is it public or private? Is it reserved or full of loud noise and vigorous activity?**

We often think of public worship before we think of our personal time of bible study and prayer as worship. Both build our relationship with the Lord. Whether you think of it as a time of piety or of agitated activity will often depend on the denomination in which you were raised. Some, like Roman Catholic, are formal and focus on age-old traditions. Some freer Christian denominations raise their hands and get emotional in worship. Take time in your group to discuss what you like about the faith culture you were raised in.

**Read Matt 6:1-15**



## **2. Verse 2. Giving is a type of worship. How does thanksgiving play into our generosity?**

Worship starts with the attitude of thanksgiving. Worship begins with the realization that the Lord has given all that you have and is thankful that the Lord is part of our lives. We know that if we have what we need, others are less fortunate. The Jews routinely dropped coins into a chest in the temple. The alms would be distributed to the needy so that the abundance that God gave one person could help others. In the sharing of resources, the people of Israel were bound into a community. As God cares for me and is generous to me, I need to be the tool that God uses to provide for other believers. Giving thus became a type of worship because we helped other people that the Lord loved just as He helped us. While we have nothing to give to a God who has everything, we can help others who God loves to please God.

## **3. Verse 2. How does confidence in God's generosity allow us to be generous? How does this quality take the burden off charity?**

I am free to give generously because I am confident that the Lord will keep giving to me. What I have received from the Lord so far is just a fraction of the gifts He will give me. I don't have to hoard what I have so that I have something in the future. I am sure the Lord will continue to provide me with my daily bread. When I have faith in God's goodness, I can be good to others. Out of the generosity that the Lord has given me, I can offer a portion to help others in their need. Such an attitude makes giving joyful and not a burden. I don't worry about the future. I enjoy helping others I love in God's family. In the process, I build a community of believers where others will be available to help me when I am in need in the future. God can use all of us to help each other in our times of need.

## **4. Verse 3. What warning does Jesus give about generosity? How does secrecy in giving honor God?**

Giving is to honor God and not so that we get honor from other people. In our day, it is common to name the wings of hospitals or even rooms in churches after the person who donates the money. God doesn't want us to "blow our own horn" as we give. We give in quiet because it is not about us but about God. The Pharisees would often make an elaborate show of giving so that people praised them for their generosity. In the temple, the alms chest for the care of the poor had a wide opening that narrowed to the chest to keep people from stealing. It looked like a trumpet, and if you put the coins in just right, the coins would make a loud rattle down the tube announcing your generosity. God wants secrecy so that your giving honors Him and not you. He wants us to give because we have experienced His love and not so that others will provide us with recognition. Giving is to be between you and God alone.

## **5. Verse 3. How does thankfulness open us up for greater gifts from the Lord?**

Giving builds the relationship that we have with the Lord. When we give generously, we have a chance to see how the Lord will provide for us rather than us needing to provide for the future without Him. We learn to depend on God and come to Him first in our needs because we know and have experienced the care that our Lord gives. It also offers God a chance to give us more. God abundantly blesses the giver because He knows that those gifts are passed on to others. Such people know that they can't outgive God. They become a conduit for God's blessings to a whole community and not just to themselves. Why would God give so generously to a miser who will keep and even waste the gifts that God gives? Thankfulness allows the Lord to bless the church and not just one person.

## **6. Verse 5. Religious leaders were often hypocrites in Jesus' day. What does God want in prayer, and why?**

The second act of worship that Jesus spoke about was prayer. Some people, especially religious leaders, wanted people to think they were holier than the average person. Remember the parable of the Pharisee and Publican. The Pharisee stood in the middle of the temple, shouting how great he was. It was not a

prayer worshipping God. It was a prayer worshipping self. God wants us to have an intimate conversation with Him. It doesn't matter if anyone sees you pray or hears what you say. Prayer is a time to have a conversation with a God you love and respect. You thank Him for the wonderful things He does for you. You give Him your burdens and ask your special friend for help. You even confess the sins that you want no one else to know about so that God can forgive them and take away the burden. This time with the Lord is to be an oasis in your day when you get rid of the trash of sin and stress while being encouraged by someone who loves you.

**7. Verse 7 What does Jesus say is to be the tone in prayer? How are impressive or flowery words sometimes detrimental to our prayer?**

If we copy the prayers we hear at church, we can think that prayers must be worded just right with big words or some royal language. Jesus says our private prayers are to have a different tone. We use ordinary words and talk to the Lord as we would speak to a friend. Spending time to get just the right word or phrase in prayer will keep us from expressing our hearts. We will use language that we think will impress God or others instead of words that come from our hearts and our hurts. It is better to speak what we believe even if we don't say it as clearly as we want. If we find that we don't know what to say, turn to the psalms and repeat the prayers of the saints that are similar to the needs we want to express. Let their hearts speak ordinary words for you.

**8. Verse 7. If God knows what we will ask before we do so, what value does continued prayer have for us?**

Prayer is not sending a request to a supplier. It is a chance to talk to a friend who will help you with your hurts and stress. Prayer is a gift from God, for it is our chance to come into the throne room of heaven and put all the troubles of the world into His hands and receive love and peace in their place. It is often in the act of praying that God teaches us to wait patiently or redirects us so that we see we need something else instead of the answer we want. Prayer is our chance to talk things out with someone that we love. Over days or even months of prayer, we have an opportunity to see things clearer. We begin to see what we need instead of demanding that our will be done. Prayer develops trust so that we start seeking God's will instead of our own. We learn that God knows best.

**9. Verses 9-10. What kind of relationship are we to desire from the Lord in the first three petitions of the Lord's prayer?**

In this prayer, we begin by asking that the Lord might help us to honor Him. It is not an easy thing to do for selfish people like us. However, if we do not glorify him in our life, we will not learn to depend on Him and align our life and purpose with His will. Those who honor the Lord will want His kingdom to surround them in all they do. It is to be our model for living, and we want others to be part of that kingdom as well. We want God's rule to impact our lives and communities so that they will be Godly places filled with His love. Finally, we want help doing His will in our lives. We know that God has a plan for us and that it will be the best future we can have. The three petitions are a plea that faith is not something only of the mind but also something that we live out in a close relationship with the Lord each day.

**10. Why does the Lord's Prayer focus on our relationship with God? How do commitment and obedience bring blessings?**

The truth is that we live with one foot in heaven and the other here on earth. We want the blessings of heaven even though we live mortal lives each day. The benefits of heaven come as we live in a closer and closer relationship with the Lord. We want a bit of heaven here on earth. We want the love, joy, and peace that we will have in heaven to come to us in an incomplete way here on earth. That comes only when we build our relationship with the Lord. We commit to Him and obey His will so that we don't get in the way

of the blessings He wants to bring to our lives. When we pray this first part of the prayer, we ask that the Lord lead us and guide us so that we can be part of His will for the world around us. We want Him to control us and the world so that both are better by His work.

**11. Verses 11-13. What are the three spiritual blessings we request in the Lord's prayer? How do they cover our past, present, and future?**

While there is only one petition about daily bread to cover our physical needs, there are three petitions about our spiritual needs as believers. It gives a sense that Jesus believes that the spiritual is far more critical than the physical. In this prayer, we ask for forgiveness for past sins. We don't want the past to keep us under a layer of guilt, robbing us of the joy in faith and keeping us distant from the Lord. We ask for help each day as we face the constant temptations of life. This is the present danger that we face, for a single sin can change the course of our life just as David's adultery changed his future. We ask that the Lord would help us to see the truth and not to fall to Satan's trickery. Finally, we ask that the Lord deliver us from the evil one who is a constant threat throughout our life. We know that we will face trials while we are here on the earth but that our Lord is stronger than the Devil.

**12. Why is it essential to our health to forgive the past? How can we forgive even if we can't forget?**

Forgiveness may be difficult in certain situations, but it is the healthy thing to do. In forgiving others, we release ourselves from anger and the desire for revenge. The person may not deserve to be forgiven and may continue to act poorly toward us and others. Forgiveness helps us so that the sinful actions of others don't control how we act. We forgive and put them out of our lives. What if you can't or shouldn't forget? It may be that a car dealer sold you a lemon or a friend betrayed your trust. You can forgive them but have learned a lesson you will not forget. You will never use that dealer or trust that friend again. Remembering how they hurt you can be beneficial. Letting that knowledge control your emotions or cause you to act in sin can be overcome by forgiving and letting go. If the sin is grievous, it may be helpful to ask the Lord to punish them so that they don't hurt others as the psalmist does in the imprecatory Psalms (Psalm 35, 58, 69, 83, 109, and 137). Let God deal with sinners and be freed by the release of forgiveness.

**13. What rewards do we receive from worship? How is worship about our good as well as God's glory?**

Too often we think of worship as something we do for the Lord that we must endure if we want to have salvation. Realize that we receive more from worship than we give. Worship is a time to learn what God will do for us and to connect with the Lord in a unique way. As you pray, you release your burdens and find joy in communion with the Lord. Here we find the answers that will help us with life's problems. Here, we experience the provision and protection of God. The worship of giving allows us to learn to trust God. We see His generosity as we give to others. Only those who give to the Lord experience the peace that comes from a secure future. Such worship will affect not only your life but the lives of those you love. The connections we build with the Lord will impact our spouse, children, coworkers, and friends. Having the Lord as an important part of life gives all those we touch an advantage in life that no one can take away.

**For now, or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 How is worship done in your church? In what way can worship be practiced so that it impresses others more than connects us with the Lord?

Deep 2 If God commands us to pray in secret, what is the value of public prayer with others?

Deep 3 As you look at the last three petitions of the Lord's prayer, which area (past, present, or future) do you need the most help in?

#### **4. Faith replaces worry**

**Matt. 6:25-32**

#### **Big idea: Placing God in charge gives us joy and a life of fulfillment**

Jesus says that worry is harmful to our lives. You can call it concern, anxiety, or just your cross to bear, but the results are still the same. It shortens life (verse 27) and tears you up. For that reason, Jesus gives us four reasons to have faith and not worry. First, He tells us that we can trust God. Just look at nature and see how the Lord keeps everything running and provides for His creation despite what man does. Second, He tells us that we can't control life. Worrying is my admission that the world is bigger and more complex than I can manage. Letting God be in charge frees me so that I can enjoy the life He gives me. Third, we can trust the Lord to provide for His children. Complaining and worrying have little power. Prayer works wonders. When I bring my problems to the Lord, I seek out the one who can truly make a difference. Finally, worry gets in the way of doing better things for the Lord and others. Anxiety is often about my comfort. Trusting the Lord gives me the confidence to build a life that develops my gifts from God and uses them for the benefit of others. Worry tears me down. Faith builds me up.

You can see the worry on a person's face and feel it when the nation faces problems. It affects our appetites, relationships, and ability to work and sleep. Pat responses like "Don't worry, be happy" don't cut it. Faith alone overcomes worry and gives us peace. When we wonder about a problem, we can worry and try to figure out how we are going to control the problem, or we can give our concerns to the Lord. Prayer frees us from distress and allows us to enjoy each day, focusing on living our lives while trusting the Lord to handle important problems. My problem is that I often think God isn't working fast enough. I get uncomfortable just waiting for things to improve, and my mind wanders and creates scenarios where simple problems mushroom into earth-shattering crises. I get immobilized so that I can't do simple things in life. The sooner I admit that I can't control things and give my concerns to the Lord, the faster I can live my life with His joy and peace. In worry, I often make things worse. With faith, I let the Lord make things better. God can help where I can't.

Three words of Jesus in this text point me to a better life. The first is faith. Worry centers on me and always disappoints. Faith believes God will give us the things we need each day so that we can enjoy the life He gives. The second word is Father. My faith must be in the Father and not in myself, the government, or anything else. As I build a relationship with God in Bible study and prayer, I grow to know how much He loves me and will care for me. I trust Him because I see day after day what He is willing to do for me. The last word is first. I conquer worry by coming to the Lord first and not as my last resort. I believe that the Lord will help me and that He always has the power to control all the problems that you and I face. I take life one day at a time and place each of those days in God's hands. The world around me can be crumbling, but the Lord can bring me through each disaster in life. The secret to happiness and peace is to live believing that God can handle everything that is too great for me.

#### **1. What is your greatest worry in life right now? Is there anything you could change, or is it entirely out of your hands?**

Your answer may vary from day to day or year to year in life. It may be a personal problem you are facing or something happening in the world or the nation. Let the group discuss their worries of the moment. Often, if it is something that we are worrying about, it is something that we can't control. We feel uncomfortable and want to fix things. Take time for the group to discuss what you can do when problems come and what is out of your hands.

**Read Matt. 6:25-32**

## **2. Verse 25. What three worries does Jesus discourage in this message?**

Jesus is speaking to a society that was short on the basic needs of life. They were not worrying about their retirement plans or wars in other parts of the Roman Empire. Many barely had enough to live, so he began with the basic needs of life, namely life, food, and clothing. These were the daily concerns of many of the people that Jesus was speaking with and got in the way of their relationship with the Lord. They are still the basics of life for Christians. If you don't have food, clothing, and health, all the other things don't matter. Jesus is concerned that such things should not take priority over our relationship with the Lord. God takes care of the simple things in life, and Jesus will spend time in the rest of the text sharing with us why we need to trust God to provide what we can't give ourselves.

## **3. Verse 26. What is the first reason Jesus gives us not to worry?**

Maybe Jesus saw some birds overhead as He spoke. They need food and depend on the Lord to provide food in the proper seasons. They work to gather food for themselves and their families, but they don't seem to worry. The lesson is that we need to trust the Lord. He provides for the birds and will provide for His people because we are more valuable than animals. As you look at the problems of the world and in your life, stop and think about how the Lord keeps the world running. All of man's efforts spend a lot of time and money trying to solve the world's problems with little success. God keeps the world running effortlessly. Everything that we have ultimately comes from God's hand. Trust Him and turn to Him for the needs of life. You are precious to Him.

## **4. Verse 26. Why is trusting God superior to worry?**

Whenever you find yourself in crisis, you have two options. You can worry and focus on the problem, or you can trust the God who shows you by the cross and by His constant care of you how much He loves you. If we worry, we are trying to change things that we usually can't alter. We will think of all the things that can go wrong (and may never happen), or we can give God the problem in prayer and let someone who can really handle our problems and take care of them. It is all about trusting the God who runs the earth and feeds the animals to take care of your needs. That doesn't mean that you are lazy or ignore your problems. It just means that you seek answers from the Lord instead of trying to find a solution yourself.

## **5. Verse 27. Why is worry useless? How does worry keep you from doing the things that bring joy in life?**

Jesus says it plainly. "Who can add a single hour to his life?" We have to admit that we can't control life. We may be concerned about things in our life, the lives of friends, or even in the world, but most of the time, those things are too big for me to handle. There is also the problem that worry can make things worse. When we are all harried, we do foolish things that can make things worse. We work ourselves up and tire ourselves out, which can cause physical illness. Worry also immobilizes us, sucking the joy out of every moment and keeping us from doing the good things we do every day for the people around us. We are so focused on the crisis that we stop enjoying the good parts of our lives and taking the time to help those around us. If you can't control the future, keep doing good and Godly things and let the Lord take care of what happens later in life.

## **6. Verse 27. When we give control to the Lord, what are we free to do?**

If I focus on worry, I pace back and forth and never think of anyone else. Giving my problem to Jesus in prayer is a chance to be free to enjoy each day. We can focus on the tasks that will make a difference in life. We can take care of our finances, health, and relationships by doing the things we always do to make life better. We can't control the future, but if we manage what we do in the present because we trust the Lord with the future, we will continue to do the things that make the future better. We have the energy and focus to do those things instead of the good things we could do, being lost in our worries and wondering what more we could do. God frees me to live when I give Him my concerns.



**7. Verse 30. As we look at nature, what comfort do we receive from God's character?**

Nature shows us that God is in control and that God cares. Sitting on the slope near the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the crowd was surrounded by grass and wildflowers that grow each year in all their beauty. The seasons with their colors, remind us of God's dominion over all of nature. Grass can't move to a new place to find water or nourishment. God must provide it in just the right amounts. Man thinks that he can control nature or improve on it, yet we can't understand all its complexities. As we look at God's character, we see how God is wise and powerful enough to keep the entire world running despite man. He loves us enough that He will use the same wisdom and power to meet our needs. We have to trust God to provide for us like He does the flowers. We have value in God's eyes, and He will care for us.

**8. Verse 30. How does our impatience get in our way of faith?**

Often our head knows God can take care of it all, but our emotions want the crisis over now. We pray to the Lord about our troubles and struggle when the solution doesn't come fast enough or come in the way we wanted. We rush in to fix things and keep God from helping us as we make matters worse. The wise admit their weakness and trust in God's care and abundance. They keep praying about their concerns so that the Lord can encourage them and comfort them as they pray and read the scriptures. God will help us to realize that He is working behind the scenes putting all the pieces together and coordinating our solution with the people around us. We need to put the problem in God's hands and leave it there rather than ruining the good that God is doing for us.

**9. Verse 32. Who does Jesus say is consumed with worry about food, drink, and clothing? Why would they be more likely to worry?**

While worry has no place in the life of the Christian, it is common in the life of those who don't know Jesus. Since they don't know how to pray and have never depended on Jesus for help in their lives, they have become accustomed to trying to manage everything themselves. For them, the bare necessities are not provided by a loving God who cares for them. They are provided by the sweat of their brow or the goodness of earthly government, both of whom are wildly unreliable. Each day is spent with the actions that will ensure that you have the basics of life and the other things that you want for the present and the future. Christians are blessed in that God knows you need these things and provides them. We live under His mercy and not only under our labors.

**10. What is the difference between planning for the future and worrying?**

Some want to classify planning with worry as if we are no better than the Gentiles. There is an enormous difference, however. Planning should always be done in the framework of faith. We plan what we would like in the future but realize that it is ultimately God's will what the future will bring (James 4:15). We have faith that God will continue to take care of us, and we plan our lives so that we can be a benefit to others. We don't worry if it doesn't turn out just like we thought it should because we know that God will make things work out better than we could ever plan. Planning doesn't have to have the anxiety that is inherent in worry. It is based on God's dreams for His people and trusts the Lord to take our simple plans and surpass our wildest dreams.

**11. Verse 33. What is to be our focus in life instead of worry? How will such a focus bring the joy we seek?**

Worry is about self. Our focus is to be Christian living and service. Every life has priorities. Anxiety comes when our life is about our comfort and self-worth. We don't care how it affects others as long as it is good for us. God has something better in mind for you. It may not always be easy, but it will benefit you and those around you. It will be based on God's commands in scripture so that we live a Godly life filled with His values and character. It will also be as a servant in His kingdom since life without worry

gives you the confidence to try new things that will benefit others and give glory to God. You will spend your life being the best version of yourself and having the joy and peace that comes only from living close to the Lord and working at His side. Push away worry and seek to do things that please God, and you will be far happier than if you lived only for yourself.

### **12. What does faith free you to do that you can't do if you are caught up in worry?**

Worry is often about keeping the things that we have and not letting them slip away. Faith in God's provision and protection allows us to try new things and take on significant challenges because we know that God has our back. If we depend on ourselves, we will always worry about things we can't control. If we trust in the Lord, we see opportunities that God places before us, and we trust Him enough to try them so that miracles happen for us and others. God knows you better than you know yourself. He knows what you can do since He fashioned your mind and body personally. Put life in His hands and focus on His ways, and you will enjoy the things you couldn't do without Him.

### **13. Why is trusting the Lord better than worrying, according to Jesus?**

Few of us can say that we never worry in life. The goal is to grow in faith each day so that worries are minimalized, and confidence grows. Every day brings a choice. You can pace back and forth through sleepless nights, or you can spend that time in prayer, letting the Lord comfort you and encourage you. Believe that the Lord has a future planned for you. He has given you skills and knowledge so that you can do things others cannot do. As God's people, you have a choice. You can spend your time in worry harming your health or trust the Lord and experience the joy of where He wants to take you. Why live like the heathen who frets but can't control anything? It is better to live trusting the Lord and enjoying the time of your life.

### **For now, or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 Why is it foolish to worry over things you can't control? What can worry accomplish?

Deep 2 How does prayer help when you are caught up in worry? Based on this passage, what would you like to ask God when worrying is tearing you apart?

Deep 3 How would less worry impact the quality of your life? What would it free you to do that you find challenging when you are worrying?

## 5. God's Generosity

Matt 7:7-14

**Big idea: Keep asking so that you can change your world.**

The average person in Jesus' day struggled to have enough food, to pay their Roman taxes, and to have what they needed to find shelter. Jesus looks at the crowd and calls them to turn to the Lord and ask. God wants us to keep asking, not because we need to wear Him down, but because we need to be looking toward Him when the time is right. Ask so that the Lord can arrange the pieces of the solution in their proper place. He is the one who knows what you need and when you need it. Daniel prayed for three weeks, and Nehemiah prayed for three months in the Old Testament. They were patient as the Lord prepared them and their world for the solution. It took time, but they knew that God was generous. You don't have to grovel to get the things you need from God. He is a loving God who cares about you and wants to give you the good things you need. In fact, you ask so that you have plenty to share. Christians are to share love and mercy because they trust the Lord to give them more than they need.

Christians today are often stingy in their generosity to others. We face the same shortage of money that the Jews did long ago. You never know when the furnace will break down, or someone will get sick. Yet, the key to being generous is to see that our God is gracious to us. We can depend on Him to help us in the good times and the bad. We need to be patient, which requires a lot of faith. We can't stop asking just because we conclude that God doesn't want or isn't able to help. We must believe that God knows what is best. The time it takes for the answers to come is often the time we should be listening so God can teach us how to use His gifts when they arrive. Never doubt that God is generous. As a parent, you would make sacrifices to ensure your children are fed or cared for. God is even more loving and generous than you are. Trust that He has no limitations on His love or His ability to help. When you are assisted, help others. Don't hoard His blessings. Give a portion of what He has given to others because you are confident that He will provide more. God's gift to you may be how He answers someone else's prayer.

Generosity is possible when you see God as generous. If you think God is powerful but stingy, you will be stingy too. If you see God as gracious, you will be free to keep asking for yourself and be generous when others need what God alone can give. We need to spend more time looking at the cross, for there we see Jesus giving up His life for us. If He will do that, how do the requests we make daily compare with that? We need to be patient. That requires faith and confidence in God's desire to help. God knows what we need and will be generous when the time is right. Just think back throughout your life. When you had the last great need that you prayed for, did God answer that prayer? Did God provide for you? He may not have given you exactly what you wanted. But he probably gave you what you needed. If you haven't already taken the time, take time now to thank Him for that gift. It will give you confidence that God will provide for you today at the right time. Never doubt His generosity. Ask enough that you can use some of it to help others in need.

### **1. If you could ask one thing from God today, what would it be? Why?**

Short of a mass revival in our nation so that most Americans believed in the Lord and acted with His values, there are a lot of things that you might consider the one thing you need. It might be health for a child or parent. It might be an opportunity to serve the Lord or others. It might be something relating to your security or happiness. The problem for most of us is that it is hard to think of one thing that we need more than any other. Life is a series of wants and needs, and that is OK. God is not the genie in the bottle that grants just three wishes and you are done. We have a generous God who gives multiple wishes over our lifetime. We can afford to pray for others because we know that we can't "use up" our requests of such a gracious God.

## **Read Matt 7:7-14**

### **2. Verse 7 What is Jesus stressing about our God and prayer in verse seven? What attitude should we bring to our prayers?**

Jesus stresses the generosity of God. While life is filled with troubles and pains, we can trust God to help us in each situation. The three words (ask, seek, knock) emphasize the truth that those who bring their needs to the Lord can trust that He will help them. They are all metaphors for praying that rise in intensity. To ask is to simply make our request known. To seek is to search for the answers that the Lord alone can give. To knock is to persist when we feel resistance, knowing that God is capable of opening doors that He wants us to enter. In all three instances, prayer requires trust. We must believe that God will keep on giving. Prayer requires faith that God is generous and that He loves us enough to want to help us in our need.

### **3. Verse 7. Why do people stop praying? What does that say about how we view the character of God?**

Often, we stop praying because we may believe that God should never have allowed those bad things to happen to us. “My friend is facing cancer; how could God allow that to happen.” Many people think that God doesn’t care because life isn’t perfect. Others stop praying because they don’t believe that God is listening. They make a couple of halfhearted prayers and don’t find an immediate answer. They conclude the problem is with God. That is why it is so imperative that we trust God. The three prayer verbs in verse seven go up in intensity. We don’t stop because we know that God will answer and finally open the door that we need in life. We believe in God and know He is the only place to turn in times of trouble.

### **4. Verse 8 Why is persistence important in prayer? What is the value of continued prayer?**

Jesus tells us to persist in prayer. All three verbs (ask, seek, knock) are present imperatives in the original Greek. That means we are to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking. God wants us to keep asking, not because we must wear Him down to get what we need but because we need to be ready when the time is appropriate for the answer. God will take the time in prayer to teach you and me so that we can accept and use the answers He gives. He will prepare us so that we are ready to act when the time comes for His solution to come into our lives. If we pray and give up, we are not prepared for the blessings to come. Prayer is a time when the Lord can help us to learn to depend on Him and see the wisdom in what God wants for our lives. Sadly, if we don’t care enough to keep praying or trust God to care about our needs, we often care about the situation less than we might believe.

### **5. Verse 8. What advantage does continual prayer bring to us?**

Persistent prayer changes us and prepares us. Daniel prayed for three weeks (Daniel 10:2), and Nehemiah prayed for some days (Neh. 1:4). Their prayers changed them. Nehemiah became confident enough to ask the unthinkable of the King – let me build the wall that you had told the Jews not to construct. The answer that Daniel had asked for came after that time. It was filled with terror to his companions (Dan 10:7), but the time of prayer had prepared Daniel for the message given to him. We often quit praying and are not ready for the great answers that God will give us. Continual prayer is a time of teaching from God. It is a time of encouraging us so that we can understand the workings of a powerful and all-wise God. If we quit praying, we often make it more difficult for God to work miracles or for us to be part of the solution that God is giving.

### **6. Verse 9. How does a loving parent respond to a child’s request? What does that teach us about God’s response to our prayers?**

A loving parent gives what they know is best instead of what the child thinks he needs. A stone might vaguely look like a loaf of bread but will never satisfy and can harm. We can depend on the Lord to

answer our prayers with wisdom and generosity. Sometimes humans are selfish, resentful, or stingy. God is never so, and we don't have to beg Him or grovel to get God to answer our requests. We know that whatever the Lord gives us will be good for us. We might ask for a promotion to the job in the corner office, but the Lord will not provide that if we are not suited for it, or the travel necessary for the job will hurt our family. A loving parent cares about his child, and so does the Lord. As we ask for what He wants for us, we ask for things that will be beneficial, not just suit our emotions right now.

**7. Verse 9. Why should we want what God wants for us and not always what we ask?**

We don't have God's wisdom, nor do we know what the future will bring. We can propose the solution we want, but we would be wise to ask the Lord to give us what He knows will be best for us. When God says, "Ask and it shall be given you," it is not a blank check to obtain whatever we want. We often ask for the stone when we really need bread. God is too loving for that. We often need to let our time of prayer be an opportunity for God to teach us what we need and prepare us for the answers we seek. Remember that God is never hostage to our wishes. Open yourself to God's desires, and He will lead you to a better future. Pray with patience and sincerity so that you accept the path that He wants for you because you know that it will be the path that will bring real joy and opportunity.

**8. Verse 11. What is the likelihood of God giving His children what they need? Why would He do so?**

Those who keep asking will see miracles because God is generous. Remember that this is a loving God who cares for His children and willingly gives the good things we need for a better life. Keep in mind that this is also a mighty God. The things I need may not have been within reach for my earthly father, but my heavenly Father has the power and wisdom to give me exactly what I need at the appropriate time. All the governments in the world do not have God's resources. All the powers of man cannot make a plant grow or cause the sun to rise. We know that God will always give us what we need, even if we don't know what that is. He does so because of His tremendous love for His children. The Lord will spare us when we are ignorant of our actual needs. He will teach us why we need the gifts He gives if we continue to come to Him in prayer.

**9. How does a negative attitude about God's generosity affect our prayers?**

When we don't think that God will help us, we are less likely to ask. There are people that all of us believe will never assist us, so we don't turn to them. They may be the very person we need at that moment, but we will never have their help because we don't ask. Jesus tells us to keep asking and stop doubting. Trust that your heavenly Father loves you and is just waiting for you to ask Him for instruction, comfort, and help. He may be waiting for you to pray about an issue several times so that He can prepare you for the solution you need. God is generous. Keep praying and always trust that God cares about you.

**10. Verse 12. What does the golden rule have to do with prayer and God's generosity?**

At first, the golden rule seems to have nothing to do with prayer. The reality is that God's generosity is so great that we have plenty to share. As we ask others to pray for us in our need, we should be praying for them in our prayers. Christianity is known for the love and mercy that we share with others because God has shared with us. We can be generous because God has been generous to us. We can ask the Lord to use us to help others with their needs just as we would hope that God might use others to help us. Prayer is a time to ask the Lord what He can do through us for those closest to us. Do they need food, help with chores around the house, or someone to sit with them when they are sick or in pain? God will tell us in our prayers if we ask. He will also give us the gifts that we need to provide for the care of others. Pray so that you might be able to do for others as you would have them do for you.

**11. What blessings does it bring us when we ask that God help others through us?**



As we ask the Lord to use us, we are often the one who is blessed as much as those we seek to help. More than once, I was blessed by the words of a sick person I visited so that I might cheer them up. Often, I build friendships when the Lord uses me to help people. These may even be the friendships that I rely on when I need help later. We also gain new skills and greater confidence in ourselves as we serve as the Lord's tools in the lives of others. Being God's helper allows us to see miracles, just as Elijah did in 1 Kings 17:19f when he took the widow's son and prayed over him. We trust God to use us, so we come to Him in prayer, knowing that He will be generous with others just as He is generous to us.

**12. Verse 14. What kind of prayers will a Christian have if they follow the narrow road? How will they be different than the crowds?**

God calls us to pray differently. Many will complain that God never helps them, but they often only give a halfhearted prayer to the Lord. You are to be a prayer warrior who is patient and trusting, knowing that God is generous to you and others. You will pray for days because you want His answer and not yours. You will be confident that God is generous and will always give you what is best because he loves you. Such people are far and few between. Their prayers are powerful, and they open great possibilities. The paths are like a funnel. Those on the broad path will find that it narrows like a funnel does, leaving them few options because they have left out the Lord. Those on the narrow path will be like those who enter the bottom of a funnel and, traveling with their Lord, find that the funnel widens and gives them the depth of possibilities in life that only God can provide. Keep praying to your generous God and find the opportunities of a lifetime waiting for you and the people you pray for.

**13. What difference does it make to prayer that God is a generous God?**

When you see the generosity of God, the sky is the limit. Those who see God the way that the Romans saw their gods will believe that God is fickle and you need to manipulate God to get what you need. Those on the narrow path will see God differently. They will look at God through the cross and see the depth of His generosity to us. He who thought nothing of giving up His son for us will give us what we need. We need to ask and let the Father choose what is best for us. It does mean that we need to give up control. He is not the genie in the bottle that must answer our requests the way we make them. True blessings will come in His time and in His way. Trust Him and let Him tell you what you need. That may be the narrow path, but it is the way of blessing. Our God loves you and will walk with you in your prayers, leading you to what is best for you.

**For now, or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What do you pray about, and how long will you pray about a single problem before you give up and move on to other prayers?

Deep 2 As you look back on life, when have you experienced God's answers to your deepest needs? How might a reflection on that answer to prayer give you more confidence for the future?

Deep 3 How have you been blessed by praying for others? How did God use you to help a friend in need, and how was it a blessing to you?

## 6. Known for Their Fruit

Matt 7:15-23

**Big idea: Beware of those who would lead you astray**

How was the Jewish listener to know who to listen to and believe? The simple answer is that you look at their actions and not just their words. Jesus will spend the whole chapter of Matthew 23 telling the people how the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees, have actions that don't match their words. Paul will speak in his epistles about the false teachers who talk as if they know Jesus better than he does but have lives with little character. A person's lifestyle will show who you should listen to and believe. Simply put, they will produce bad fruit. Such people will either destroy themselves or be destroyed by the Lord. The true prophets of God denounced a host of false prophets in the Old Testament and usually faced a terrible ending in life. For that reason, we judge people by their lives as well as their words. Are their lives and words in harmony with what you have learned from scripture? The false teachers of the Old Testament often proclaimed what people wanted to hear contrary to the clear words of God. Such people will face destruction and will take those easily swayed with them.

Like the Jews of Jesus' day, we often struggle to know who we can trust. The point of commercials and media is to sway us so that we bring profit to them. They tell people what they want to hear and put a spin on the news so that we keep coming back for more. We need to pay attention to their lives as well as their words. Do they tell people to make sacrifices but live in luxury themselves? Do they talk about morals and truth but live a lie filled with immoral acts and selfish lifestyles? We have seen the self-destruction of far too many of these "great" men and women over the years. Sadly, those who followed and trusted them were caught up in the damage as well. Before you follow the advice of anyone, ask if they do and speak God's will. Examine their lives to see if they are caring, self-sacrificing, and loyal people who benefit their family and friends. See if their words match what you know from scripture or if they are filled with angry and immoral ideas and divide men and women from each other. That will be hard for some Christians because they don't know the Bible as they should and will judge by feelings and not by fact. Hold people up to the light of scripture, and you will see the color of the heart inside.

How do you safeguard your faith and your future? First, be in the Bible with other Christians. As you study the Bible together, you will gain an understanding of God's truth and can spot false teachers when they occur. Second, pay attention to the lives as well as the words of those you listen to. How do they treat people and money? Are they kind and generous or pompous and self-righteous? Third, what does their religious life look like? Do they go to church, or do they spew arrogant thoughts? Do they serve the church or try to use God's people to support their ideas? Judge others but use condemnation sparingly. It is better to flee false opinions than try to attack them and become as harsh and evil as those you attack. Be generous, for some may be sincere but misguided. Speak the truth kindly so that God's truth will be heard through you by others. Finally, when you find a true prophet, take time to let the Lord teach you through them. Life is not supposed to be lived in isolation. Let the Lord use such mentors to help you grow in your faith and love for Him and others.

### **1. What commercial makes claims that sound good but are misleading in one way or another?**

I cringe when some celebrity advertises reverse mortgages for older adults. There may be specific instances where someone doesn't have a big enough pension to live on but has a beautiful home that they can sell little by little and have money for food and health care. The claims of unrestricted cash and the ease of harnessing these assets are usually wrong for most people, according to economists. Companies often want to get your home for less money than it is worth. What are commercials that bother you or that you question their validity?

## **Read Matt 7:15-23**

### **2. Verse 15. What warning does Jesus give in this section to the people sitting before Him?**

"Watch out for false prophets." False prophets were all around the people of Jesus' day. They proclaimed what they saw as good or politically correct. Jesus isn't the first to mention false prophets. They are in Isaiah 44:25, Jeremiah 23:16, Ezekiel 13:2-3, and many other places. They would claim to receive messages from God but only said what the king or people wanted to hear. Often, they were motivated by money, fame, or power. They came subtly like wolves covered with sheep's clothing, hoping to go unnoticed as they did the damage. They came not to help people but to help themselves at the expense of those who listened to them.

### **3. Verse 15 What is the danger of listening to the false teachers around you?**

Life has become confusing with so many opinions told to us as truth and with social media where anyone seems to be able to say their version of the truth. Who do you listen to as a guide to your life, health, and future? The stakes are high because the wrong piece of information can cost you dearly. It can lead you to waste your finances or make mistakes in marriage and family matters. It can cause you to doubt your faith and cause you to think that certain sins are acceptable or even the best thing to do. The false teacher will plant an idea and be gone before you realize that the falsehood will destroy the rest of your life. Jesus wants us to be careful about who we listen to and who we follow.

### **4. Verse 17. How do you distinguish good teachers and friends from those who will lead you astray in life?**

It is easier to fake words than actions. Jesus' followers will be able to discern the good from the bad by looking at their lives and conduct. "Bad fruit" will tell you that the people either don't know what they are talking about or don't follow any practical advice they may give. The wise reject these people, for even the good things they say are tainted by their other words and their lives. Look for people who live out the good things that they say. Are the teachers kind and caring to others, or are they arrogant and selfish? Do they make sacrifices for others, or do they live in luxury while they expect you to make sacrifices? If their lives don't match their words, stay away from them, and seek your counsel in other places.

### **5. Verse 17. Why do good works naturally follow faith? What makes people who live out their faith good people to follow?**

Jesus says it simply by asking if grapes are gathered from thorns or figs come from thistles. What is inside a person's heart will come out in their lives. Healthy trees bear good fruit, and harmful trees will bear bad fruit. It can be no other way. If a person believes that making sacrifices are necessary for God's will to happen, you will see some sacrifices in their lives. If they believe in the values of the Lord, they will be a person who is kind, gentle, and loving. Sin in a person's life shows what is on their heart. Seek out people who live their faith. These people will be examples that you can follow and people who have good advice when you need help discerning God's will. They have fought against the temptations in life and can help you with those temptations when you find yourself struggling in life.

### **6. Verse 19. What will happen to those who do not teach or live the truth? Is this a matter of God's punishment, natural consequences, or a combination of both?**

The Old Testament is filled with false teachers who the Lord punished. For example, Hananiah told the people that Jerusalem would never be taken (Jeremiah 28). Jeremiah confronted him, and Hananiah died within two months. Many in the Bible faced the natural consequences of their false actions. A person's words will be meaningless at the final judgment. When people don't live by the truth, there are consequences and often punishments from the Lord. Like worthless trees, they will be cut down and

thrown into the fire. There is no middle ground. You are either telling God's truth or not. The choice that you make will determine the future that you have. You can't get away from God and His truth.

**7. Verse 19. What is the danger of following false teachers? How do their lives and words affect your future?**

People that follow the bad advice of the false teachers will find that they share the same fate. We see how the sexual revolution has destroyed families and children across America. The selfish attitudes of our culture continue to lead to discontent and bad choices. For this reason, it is so important to discern the truth about those who will lead and guide us. The wrong information and advice lead people down paths that will cause them nothing but grief. It may take time to discern the truth or error of what you hear, but it will make a big difference to the path and quality of your life. Follow the wrong person, and you will face the same consequences that they do. Follow a person of character, and you are likely to have the same blessings that you see in their lives.

**8. Verse 21. Why is speaking some of the right words not enough to be part of God's kingdom? What does God require of those who claim to be His servants?**

Some will appeal to the Lord that they were doing the best they could. They may claim that He is their Lord, but their actions say that they have a different master. There is a significant difference between lip service and authentic discipleship. It is easier to say you are Christian than to live as one. God is never impressed by empty piety. He wants obedience and devotion. Many Christians today will get into heaven by the skin of their teeth. Paul alludes to that truth in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. Such people are hardly the ones that others want to model their life after or listen to their advice. As Paul says, "His work will be shown for what it is because the Day will bring it to light" (1 Cor. 3:13).

**9. Why is Bible study important for Christians if they are going to avoid false prophets?**

How can we measure a person's faith and life if we don't know what the Bible says? Many are fooled because they have no guidelines to judge whether a person's words or actions are correct. They accept what the person says or weigh them against the culture. They listen to religious leaders that promote a gospel of love promising that God will give them whatever they want. There is no talk of sacrifice or caring for others. It is often called a wealth and happiness gospel. Without a solid knowledge of what the Lord says, such words will be your undoing. Believers throughout the Bible and history have been fooled because they didn't know what the Lord taught.

**10. Verse 23. How will Jesus respond to the imposters who teach falsely? Why do you think Jesus is so harsh?**

Christ's sentence will seem harsh, but He will chase away those who do not tell the truth from His kingdom. People may point to all the pious things that they did, but it will mean nothing if they don't have a relationship with the Lord. Jesus will see all the harm they did and all the people they led away from the truth and will reserve His greatest punishments for them. They masqueraded as His people and teachers even though they knew in their hearts that they didn't believe what God said. Now it is essential to make the distinction that Jesus is not talking about the different denominations. Some argue that if you teach the wrong kind of baptism or Holy Communion or have other errors, these rebukes would apply to you. I'm afraid I have to disagree. Baptists, Lutherans, Catholics, and other denominations have a tradition of beliefs. Each of them may find when they get to heaven that something they taught was wrong. Teachers who genuinely believe in the Lord and the faith they were taught have led countless people closer to the Lord. They are not evildoers but true messengers of God's word.

**11. Can God use imperfect or non-Christian people to further His ministry? If they do good, why can't non-Christians go to heaven?**

Since no one is perfect, it is evident that the Lord can use imperfect people as His servants and teachers. Ironically, God can use those who never believe to further His ministry as well. One of the best examples of that is Cyrus, the leader of the Persians. While there is no evidence that He became a believer, the Lord calls Cyrus His shepherd (Is. 44:28), His anointed (Is. 45:1), and speaks of how He "will raise Cyrus in my righteousness" (Is. 45:13). God used Cyrus to bring the Jews back from captivity. Yet, since there is no evidence that he ever came to faith, he will not be in heaven because the only way of salvation is faith in our Lord. As we look at our world, we will see that there are people in every age that the Lord uses for His purpose. They will not be in heaven, but our Lord controls the world and can use even the worst despots for His purposes.

### **12. What tools does God give us in this text to safeguard our faith and future?**

Knowing who to follow and who to avoid is an important life lesson. It will shape our future and bring either joy or crisis for our lives. Jesus has given us His scripture as our greatest guide in deciding who to follow. Knowing the Bible helps us discern whether a person's words and actions align with our Lord and His will. It is vital that we look at a person's actions as well as their words. Sometimes, a person can sound very Godly, but we may see that their life is pompous and not kind and generous. They may be someone who advocates sacrifice while they are amassing riches at others' expense. Our leaders need to be Godly people who have put the Lord first in their words and actions. We want to follow someone who lives out their faith rather than someone who talks about God. How can they tell us God's will if they don't know our Lord?

### **13. What is the value of finding good teachers and mentors in life?**

It would be easy to read these words and think that you will never follow anyone because that would be safer. Such rationale is foolish, for no person can know everything there is to know about God. Each of us should find a prophet and listen to what they have to say. Many Godly teachers in the world have a lot to tell us. Some of my favorites are Luther, C. S. Lewis, and Warren Wiersbe, who has an excellent commentary and pastored a church in Covington, Kentucky, close to mine for many years. Be discerning about what they say but learn from them. Let them share their walk with God so that you continue to grow and understand God's will for your life. If you can be part of a small group and gather others who are learning as you are, you will be exceptionally blessed. Others will help you see truths you would miss if you were by yourself. Discard the false teachers and let those who know the Lord help you to draw closer to Him throughout your life.

### **For now, or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What teacher are you currently reading or listening to that is helping you grow? What do you like about their teaching and approach?

Deep 2 Who are you mentoring or teaching at this point? How are you growing in your faith by sharing the message of God's truth with others?

Deep 3 How has your study of God's word made it easier to tell the false prophets from the true prophets?

Do you agree that it is better to run from false prophets than to spend lots of time arguing with them?

Why or why not?



**1. Transform your character**  
**Matt. 5: 1-12**  
**Blessed by Jesus to be a blessing to others.**

Jesus has been in ministry for about a year by the time of the Sermon on the Mount. He has been tempted by Satan, healed many, and chosen disciples. The Beatitudes describe what it means to be a part of Jesus' kingdom. We are blessed by Jesus so that we can be helpers with others in the world. God wants us to depend on Him and follow the pattern of life that He offers. Blessed are those who are so poor in spirit that they realize that they need Jesus. Blessed are those who mourn their sinfulness and the state of the world around them, for Jesus will restore their lives. Blessed are those who are humble and trust God looking to Him for answers. They will receive what they need. Only those who are strengthened and prepared by Jesus will be able to act on His behalf. They will change the world by showing mercy and living with Godly character. They will bring peace to a troubled world. They will face persecution for their acts of love, but God will be there to help. In these words, Jesus shows who the disciples will become and the power they will receive to help those around them.

Jesus is among us to build us up and to encourage us to serve in His name. Like the disciples, we must have a burning desire to sit at Jesus' feet and learn, knowing that He will encourage us and comfort us when we see our failures and the failures of the world. As we are with Jesus, our Lord will change our character and provide the answers we seek in life. He will build us up, but He builds us up for a purpose. We are His servants and ambassadors in a world that needs His help. We will repair broken relationships with His mercy. We will show the Lord by the scope of our lives and bring calm to a troubled world. We will cling to the Lord so much that we will be different from the world. It may cause us pain and persecution, but we will love the Lord so much that we will never leave Him and can't be like the world instead of like Him. We will be changed by Jesus so that we can change our world.

We all have to make choices in life like the people seated before Jesus as He preached the Sermon on the Mount. As we need to choose the depth of our involvement with Jesus, we need to remember three things. First, we will gain more by being with Jesus than others will gain by keeping their distance from Him. Others will struggle while we will have Jesus to help us with answers and power. Second, we will have a purpose and value that others still need to include. As we serve as His representatives in the world, we know how we are to help others. We will be less likely to stumble through life and more likely to have a path that brings us and others blessings. Finally, we have a value that others will miss. Drawing close to Jesus, I am a better person, father, and friend. I have worth from the cross of Jesus and will be valuable to others because of the work that Jesus will do through me. Jesus blesses me to be a blessing to others. The Sermon on the Mount shows me some of the ways that Jesus helps me and how I can help others.

**1. If you had a chance to sit with Jesus today, what would you want to learn from Him?**

**Read Matt. 5: 1-12**

**2. Verse 4 What grieves you about the world and yourself? How will Jesus help you in your need?**

**3. Verse 4. What do people in the world try to take comfort with?**

**4. Verse 5 What do you think it means to be meek? How will they inherit the world compared to the strong?**

**5. Verse 6. What can those who have questions expect from the Lord?**

**6. Verse 6. Why is it important to never be satisfied with what you know about God? How do God's answers fill our deepest needs?**

**7. Verse 7. What are the blessings of being a forgiving person? How does this run counter to our world?**

**8. Verse 7. Why are those who have received mercy the best people to give God's mercy away?**

**9. Verse 8. Why is purity necessary if we are to represent God? How does purity allow us to be closer to the Lord?**

**10. How will your purity affect the world, especially those closest to you?**

**11. Verse 11. Why is it a good thing if we are persecuted? What does this truth say about our choices in life?**

**12. What would it take not to be persecuted? Why would that be a disaster for the Christian?**

**13. Why is being blessed by Jesus and being a blessing to others the best choice you can make in life?**

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 In which of the four blessings (verses 3-6) have you experienced the most progress and satisfaction over the last year of your life?

Deep 2 As you look at the four areas of servant lifestyle (verses 7-10), which would you like to develop during the next year of life?

Deep 3 What is your greatest blessing from being a child of God? Who needs to hear about what God is doing in your life because they need it in theirs?

## **2 Transform my influence**

**Matt 5:13-16**

**Big idea: Christians have the influence to transform their world**

Christian is a verb as well as a noun. It is not only who you are, but it is also what you do. Jesus is showing His followers that they are being given the power to change their world and lead others from darkness. They are not to be like the Pharisees, who are holy for themselves. They are to influence people around them by changing the character of the world and shedding God's light into their world. They do that by flavoring the world. Their values should affect their communities and help people understand how good behavior blesses everyone. They preserve the world from evil, like salt that keeps bacteria from ruining meat in the days without refrigeration. They are light that shows the truth in a world where truth is hard to find. Finally, they are the guide for those lost in the darkness of sin. Jesus wants his people to know that they have the tools to influence the world and should not just sit back and let the world around them struggle.

So what if Christians do not use their influence in the world? What if we sit in our churches and let the world go its own way? That is more than an academic question because the church has often failed to use the impact that it can have in the world. Like worthless salt, we have often been more influenced by the world around us than we flavor the community we live in. We have accepted their values and become useless to their society. They give into evil so that non-Christians don't want to be near God if that is the way His people act. Like darkness, some Christians will remain silent and not provide direction or help when society has lost its way. They refuse to publically do what is correct so that evil can be seen and struggle to exist along with the good of God's people. Finally, Christians who are not light allow their friends to be overtaken by sinful behavior. While people often do not listen to sound advice, Christians still need to warn or help others when people struggle in the darkness. If we don't use our influence, we abandon people to the world that hates them.

God has made us ambassadors of His power so that others see God's ways and are affected positively by our words and lives. When we fail to be salt and light in our world, we doom our world because they don't know a better way. We fail to improve the world that we must live in and shouldn't complain when it seems like everything is worse than it used to be. Our influence from the Lord is meant to be helpful to others and to change the fabric of the world we live in. The disciples lived in a world that was in trouble. Romans were as vile as their gods. The Pharisees and other Jews cared only about their relationship with God and would not lift a finger to help others draw closer to a God who loved them. There are days that we don't like the world we live in, so we must live as Christians so that God can change the world through us. We can be caring and kindly speak the truth rather than just letting evil crush people around us. We can be so Godly that others find it hard to be sinful and selfish around us. The world may have troubles, but the power of God will change others through the life we live.

**1. What is one food that isn't the same without salt?**

**Read Matt 5:13-16**

**2. Verse 13 a. What does it mean that Christians are the salt of the Earth? How do Christians like salt flavor their world?**

**3. Verse 13a. What flavor is a world when there are no Christians or when Christians are not using their influence?**

- 4. Verse 13b. Salt can preserve food. How do Christians preserve the world that they live in?**
- 5. Verse 13b. What has the world lost if Christians become just as evil as the society they live in?**
- 6. Verse 14. How are Christians the light of the world? What light do they shine?**
- 7. Verse 14. Without the light of the Lord, what does the world become for its inhabitants?**
- 8. Verse 15. How does the light of God through His people guide people in a scary world?**
- 9. What is the outcome for the world when Christians either refuse to show their light or don't know God's truth enough to share it?**
- 10. Verse 16. If Christians live as salt and light, what will be the effect on the people around them?**
- 11. What blessings come to the Christian when they have used their influence on behalf of the Lord?**
- 12. Why does Jesus believe that Christians will have more influence than other groups?**
- 13. Christians have influence. What is at stake if Christians do not use their influence for the Lord?**

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 How trustworthy is the scripture? Why is it the ultimate source of light in the world compared to all the other sources that we could use?

Deep 2 How do believers hide their light? Why would they hide the truth of God under a cover and keep it from others?

Deep 3 What problem of the world leaves a hole in your heart when you hear about it? How could you or your group make a dent in that problem by living out your faith and speaking the truth?

### **3. Real worship**

**Matt 6:1-15**

**Big idea: Worship gives glory to God and blessings to us.**

Worship is something every Christian does, but few appreciate it. The Jews were required to visit the temple for special feasts. It had become their duty. Jesus will teach the crowd about two acts of worship and show the deeper meaning of each. He wants worship to be a time to give glory to God and to be beneficial to us. Jesus begins with a discourse on giving. The Jews routinely dropped thank offerings for those in need into a chest at the temple. Such giving was to be quietly done so they could guard against selfish motives. Unfortunately, the chest had a wide opening that narrowed just before the chest opening. It looked like a trumpet, so if you put the coins in just right, they made a loud rattle down the tube, announcing your generosity. It was not what God desired.

Jesus warned against prayer done just for show. Instead, it was to be an intimate conversation with the Lord that used common words, not flowery words or elaborate formulas. God wants you to speak to Him from the heart. Worship is about honoring God and being blessed by Him.

Worship can be one of the greatest things that happens to you each week and each day. It can change your life, for it is the avenue to building a solid relationship with the Lord. We learn to give because we are confident that the Lord will take care of us. We don't worry about tomorrow because we know that the Lord will provide us with what we need each day. That means I can be generous instead of hoarding what I have. I also give quietly because my giving is not to provide me with glory but to show how I appreciate what the Lord is doing for me. I give because I know that He will continue to provide for me so that I can be a blessing to others. Prayers are private as well. That doesn't mean I should never pray in public. It just means that I don't pray, so others see me and think I am religious. I pray because I want God to hear and help. He is my heavenly Father who listens to my every word. My words are from my heart in my language without having to speak to impress God. Worship is my time to be with God so I can share my heart and let Him build me up.

Worship focused on God has rewards. It is a chance to build a personal relationship with God so that our lives can depend on His power and wisdom. If I am more regular in worship, I am more likely to receive help from God because I am more comfortable in prayer and know what He wants to give me. I will have the courage to ask for miracles and will not get in the way of His help. In His word, I will find answers to my questions and comfort when I am hurting. I will have his values and be generous like He has been generous to me. Life is better when I am in worship because of my connection with the Lord. It gives me an advantage that nothing can take from me. It helps me to have the values and courage to raise my children and to work at my job. I don't worship God to gain His favor. I am the one who benefits the most from worship, for God gives me far more than I can ever give to Him. My time in worship is one of the highlights of life. It is a piece of heaven here on earth.

**1. What image do you have when you think of worship? Is it public or private? Is it reserved or full of loud noise and vigorous activity?**

**Read Matt 6:1-15**

**2. Verse 2. Giving is a type of worship. How does thanksgiving play into our generosity?**

**3. Verse 2. How does confidence in God's generosity allow us to be generous? How does this quality take the burden off charity?**



- 4. Verse 3. What warning does Jesus give about generosity? How does secrecy in giving honor God?**
- 5. Verse 3. How does thankfulness open us up for greater gifts from the Lord?**
- 6. Verse 5. Religious leaders were often hypocrites in Jesus' day. What does God want in prayer, and why?**
- 7. Verse 7. What does Jesus say is to be the tone in prayer? How are impressive or flowery words sometimes detrimental to our prayer?**
- 8. Verse 7. If God knows what we will ask before we do so, what value does continued prayer have for us?**
- 9. Verses 9-10. What kind of relationship are we to desire from the Lord in the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer?**
- 10. Why does the Lord's Prayer focus on our relationship with God? How do commitment and obedience bring blessings?**
- 11. Verses 11-13. What are the three spiritual blessings we request in the Lord's prayer? How do they cover our past, present, and future?**
- 12. Why is it essential to our health to forgive the past? How can we forgive even if we can't forget?**
- 13. What rewards do we receive from worship? How is worship about our good as well as God's glory?**

**For now, or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 How is worship done in your church? In what way can worship be practiced so that it impresses others more than connects us with the Lord?

Deep 2 If God commands us to pray in secret, what is the value of public prayer with others?

Deep 3 As you look at the last three petitions of the Lord's prayer, which area (past, present, or future) do you need the most help in?

#### **4. Faith replaces worry**

**Matt. 6:25-32**

**Big idea: Placing God in charge gives us joy and a life of fulfillment**

Jesus says that worry is harmful to our lives. You can call it concern, anxiety, or just your cross to bear, but the results are still the same. It shortens life (verse 27) and tears you up. For that reason, Jesus gives us four reasons to have faith and not worry. First, He tells us that we can trust God. Just look at nature and see how the Lord keeps everything running and provides for His creation despite what man does. Second, He tells us that we can't control life. Worrying is my admission that the world is bigger and more complex than I can manage. Letting God be in charge frees me so that I can enjoy the life He gives me. Third, we can trust the Lord to provide for His children. Complaining and worrying have little power. Prayer works wonders. When I bring my problems to the Lord, I seek out the one who can truly make a difference. Finally, worry gets in the way of doing better things for the Lord and others. Anxiety is often about my comfort. Trusting the Lord gives me the confidence to build a life that develops my gifts from God and uses them for the benefit of others. Worry tears me down. Faith builds me up.

You can see the worry on a person's face and feel it when the nation faces problems. It affects our appetites, relationships, and ability to work and sleep. Pat responses like "Don't worry, be happy" don't cut it. Faith alone overcomes worry and gives us peace. When we wonder about a problem, we can worry and try to figure out how we are going to control the problem, or we can give our concerns to the Lord. Prayer frees us from distress and allows us to enjoy each day, focusing on living our lives while trusting the Lord to handle important problems. My problem is that I often think God isn't working fast enough. I get uncomfortable just waiting for things to improve, and my mind wanders and creates scenarios where simple problems mushroom into earth-shattering crises. I get immobilized so that I can't do simple things in life. The sooner I admit that I can't control things and give my concerns to the Lord, the faster I can live my life with His joy and peace. In worry, I often make things worse. With faith, I let the Lord make things better. God can help where I can't.

Three words of Jesus in this text point me to a better life. The first is faith. Worry centers on me and always disappoints. Faith believes God will give us the things we need each day so that we can enjoy the life He gives. The second word is Father. My faith must be in the Father and not in myself, the government, or anything else. As I build a relationship with God in Bible study and prayer, I grow to know how much He loves me and will care for me. I trust Him because I see day after day what He is willing to do for me. The last word is first. I conquer worry by coming to the Lord first and not as my last resort. I believe that the Lord will help me and that He always has the power to control all the problems that you and I face. I take life one day at a time and place each of those days in God's hands. The world around me can be crumbling, but the Lord can bring me through each disaster in life. The secret to happiness and peace is to live believing that God can handle everything that is too great for me.

**1. What is your greatest worry in life right now? Is there anything you could change, or is it entirely out of your hands?**

**Read Matt. 6:25-32**

**2. Verse 25. What three worries does Jesus discourage in this message?**

**3. Verse 26. What is the first reason Jesus gives us not to worry?**

**4. Verse 26. Why is trusting God superior to worry?**

- 5. Verse 27. Why is worry useless? How does worry keep you from doing the things that bring joy in life?**
- 6. Verse 27. When we give control to the Lord, what are we free to do?**
- 7. Verse 30. As we look at nature, what comfort do we receive from God's character?**
- 8. Verse 30. How does our impatience get in our way of faith?**
- 9. Verse 32. Who does Jesus say is consumed with worry about food, drink, and clothing? Why would they be more likely to worry?**
- 10. What is the difference between planning for the future and worrying?**
- 11. Verse 33. What is to be our focus in life instead of worry? How will such a focus bring the joy we seek?**
- 12. What does faith free you to do that you can't do if you are caught up in worry?**
- 13. Why is trusting the Lord better than worrying, according to Jesus?**

**For now, or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 Why is it foolish to worry over things you can't control? What can worry accomplish?

Deep 2 How does prayer help when you are caught up in worry? Based on this passage, what would you like to ask God when worrying is tearing you apart?

Deep 3 How would less worry impact the quality of your life? What would it free you to do that you find challenging when you are worrying?

## **5. God's Generosity**

### **Matt 7:7-14**

**Big idea: Keep asking so that you can change your world.**

The average person in Jesus' day struggled to have enough food, to pay their Roman taxes, and to have what they needed to find shelter. Jesus looks at the crowd and calls them to turn to the Lord and ask. God wants us to keep asking, not because we need to wear Him down, but because we need to be looking toward Him when the time is right. Ask so that the Lord can arrange the pieces of the solution in their proper place. He is the one who knows what you need and when you need it. Daniel prayed for three weeks, and Nehemiah prayed for three months in the Old Testament. They were patient as the Lord prepared them and their world for the solution. It took time, but they knew that God was generous. You don't have to grovel to get the things you need from God. He is a loving God who cares about you and wants to give you the good things you need. In fact, you ask so that you have plenty to share. Christians are to share love and mercy because they trust the Lord to give them more than they need.

Christians today are often stingy in their generosity to others. We face the same shortage of money that the Jews did long ago. You never know when the furnace will break down, or someone will get sick. Yet, the key to being generous is to see that our God is gracious to us. We can depend on Him to help us in the good times and the bad. We need to be patient, which requires a lot of faith. We can't stop asking just because we conclude that God doesn't want or isn't able to help. We must believe that God knows what is best. The time it takes for the answers to come is often the time we should be listening so God can teach us how to use His gifts when they arrive. Never doubt that God is generous. As a parent, you would make sacrifices to ensure your children are fed or cared for. God is even more loving and generous than you are. Trust that He has no limitations on His love or His ability to help. When you are assisted, help others. Don't hoard His blessings. Give a portion of what He has given to others because you are confident that He will provide more. God's gift to you may be how He answers someone else's prayer.

Generosity is possible when you see God as generous. If you think God is powerful but stingy, you will be stingy too. If you see God as gracious, you will be free to keep asking for yourself and be generous when others need what God alone can give. We need to spend more time looking at the cross, for there we see Jesus giving up His life for us. If He will do that, how do the requests we make daily compare with that? We need to be patient. That requires faith and confidence in God's desire to help. God knows what we need and will be generous when the time is right. Just think back throughout your life. When you had the last great need that you prayed for, did God answer that prayer? Did God provide for you? He may not have given you exactly what you wanted. But he probably gave you what you needed. If you haven't already taken the time, take time now to thank Him for that gift. It will give you confidence that God will provide for you today at the right time. Never doubt His generosity. Ask enough that you can use some of it to help others in need.

**1. If you could ask one thing from God today, what would it be? Why?**

**Read Matt 7:7-14**

**2. Verse 7 What is Jesus stressing about our God and prayer in verse seven? What attitude should we bring to our prayers?**

**3. Verse 7. Why do people stop praying? What does that say about how we view the character of God?**

- 4. Verse 8 Why is persistence important in prayer? What is the value of continued prayer?**
- 5. Verse 8. What advantage does continual prayer bring to us?**
- 6. Verse 9. How does a loving parent respond to a child's request? What does that teach us about God's response to our prayers?**
- 7. Verse 9. Why should we want what God wants for us and not always what we ask?**
- 8. Verse 11. What is the likelihood of God giving His children what they need? Why would He do so?**
- 9. How does a negative attitude about God's generosity affect our prayers?**
- 10. Verse 12. What does the golden rule have to do with prayer and God's generosity?**
- 11. What blessings does it bring us when we ask that God help others through us?**
- 12. Verse 14. What kind of prayers will a Christian have if they follow the narrow road? How will they be different than the crowds?**
- 13. What difference does it make to prayer that God is a generous God?**

**For now, or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What do you pray about, and how long will you pray about a single problem before you give up and move on to other prayers?

Deep 2 As you look back on life, when have you experienced God's answers to your deepest needs? How might a reflection on that answer to prayer give you more confidence for the future?

Deep 3 How have you been blessed by praying for others? How did God use you to help a friend in need, and how was it a blessing to you?



## **6. Known for Their Fruit**

**Matt 7:15-23**

**Big idea: Beware of those who would lead you astray**

How was the Jewish listener to know who to listen to and believe? The simple answer is that you look at their actions and not just their words. Jesus will spend the whole chapter of Matthew 23 telling the people how the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees, have actions that don't match their words. Paul will speak in his epistles about the false teachers who talk as if they know Jesus better than he does but have lives with little character. A person's lifestyle will show who you should listen to and believe. Simply put, they will produce bad fruit. Such people will either destroy themselves or be destroyed by the Lord. The true prophets of God denounced a host of false prophets in the Old Testament and usually faced a terrible ending in life. For that reason, we judge people by their lives as well as their words. Are their lives and words in harmony with what you have learned from scripture? The false teachers of the Old Testament often proclaimed what people wanted to hear contrary to the clear words of God. Such people will face destruction and will take those easily swayed with them.

Like the Jews of Jesus' day, we often struggle to know who we can trust. The point of commercials and media is to sway us so that we bring profit to them. They tell people what they want to hear and put a spin on the news so that we keep coming back for more. We need to pay attention to their lives as well as their words. Do they tell people to make sacrifices but live in luxury themselves? Do they talk about morals and truth but live a lie filled with immoral acts and selfish lifestyles? We have seen the self-destruction of far too many of these "great" men and women over the years. Sadly, those who followed and trusted them were caught up in the damage as well. Before you follow the advice of anyone, ask if they do and speak God's will. Examine their lives to see if they are caring, self-sacrificing, and loyal people who benefit their family and friends. See if their words match what you know from scripture or if they are filled with angry and immoral ideas and divide men and women from each other. That will be hard for some Christians because they don't know the Bible as they should and will judge by feelings and not by fact. Hold people up to the light of scripture, and you will see the color of the heart inside.

How do you safeguard your faith and your future? First, be in the Bible with other Christians. As you study the Bible together, you will gain an understanding of God's truth and can spot false teachers when they occur. Second, pay attention to the lives as well as the words of those you listen to. How do they treat people and money? Are they kind and generous or pompous and self-righteous? Third, what does their religious life look like? Do they go to church, or do they spew arrogant thoughts? Do they serve the church or try to use God's people to support their ideas? Judge others but use condemnation sparingly. It is better to flee false opinions than try to attack them and become as harsh and evil as those you attack. Be generous, for some may be sincere but misguided. Speak the truth kindly so that God's truth will be heard through you by others. Finally, when you find a true prophet, take time to let the Lord teach you through them. Life is not supposed to be lived in isolation. Let the Lord use such mentors to help you grow in your faith and love for Him and others.

**1. What commercial makes claims that sound good but are misleading in one way or another?**

**Read Matt 7:15-23**

**2. Verse 15. What warning does Jesus give in this section to the people sitting before Him?**

**3. Verse 15 What is the danger of listening to the false teachers around you?**

- 4. Verse 17. How do you distinguish good teachers and friends from those who will lead you astray in life?**
- 5. Verse 17. Why do good works naturally follow faith? What makes people who live out their faith good people to follow?**
- 6. Verse 19. What will happen to those who do not teach or live the truth? Is this a matter of God's punishment, natural consequences, or a combination of both?**
- 7. Verse 19. What is the danger of following false teachers? How do their lives and words affect your future?**
- 8. Verse 21. Why is speaking some of the right words not enough to be part of God's kingdom? What does God require of those who claim to be His servants?**
- 9. Why is Bible study important for Christians if they are going to avoid false prophets?**
- 10. Verse 23. How will Jesus respond to the imposters who teach falsely? Why do you think Jesus is so harsh?**
- 11. Can God use imperfect or non-Christian people to further His ministry? If they do good, why can't non-Christians go to heaven?**
- 12. What tools does God give us in this text to safeguard our faith and future?**
- 13. What is the value of finding good teachers and mentors in life?**

**For now, or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What teacher are you currently reading or listening to that is helping you grow? What do you like about their teaching and approach?

Deep 2 Who are you mentoring or teaching at this point? How are you growing in your faith by sharing the message of God's truth with others?

Deep 3 How has your study of God's word made it easier to tell the false prophets from the true prophets? Do you agree that it is better to run from false prophets than to spend lots of time arguing with them? Why or why not?

## About the author

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## Did you know?

*How well do you know the Sermon on the Mount? Here are seven questions that are answered in this study. The page and question number in this study are given after each question.*

1. Why are those who have received mercy the best people to give God's mercy away? (Page 7, Question 8)
2. Why is it a good thing if we are persecuted? What does that say about our lives? (Page 8, Question 11)
3. What has the world lost if Christians become just as evil as the society they live in? (Page 10, Question 5)
4. How does thankfulness open us up for greater gifts from the Lord? (Page 14, Question 3)
5. How does worry keep you from doing the things that bring joy in life? (Page 18, Question 5)
6. Why is persistence important in prayer? What is the value of continued prayer? (Page 22, Question 4)
7. Can God use imperfect or non-Christian people to further His ministry? (Page 27, Question 11)

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