

The Sermon on the Mount



Cover Design

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In our world, we often fixate and measure our importance and relevance by what we do and accomplish. Yet, the **Sermon on the Mount** invites us to shift our attention from **what we do** to a deeper understanding of **who we are**.

I wanted this art piece to focus more on the internal transformation that happens when someone places their faith in Christ.

The glowing cross symbolises this internal and eternal shift toward the Kingdom of God. From here, the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount begin to flow out and shape our lives.

So rather than following a mere set of rules, these teachings guide us on **a journey of transformation**, and with His Spirit, help us to live them out in a genuine and authentic way.

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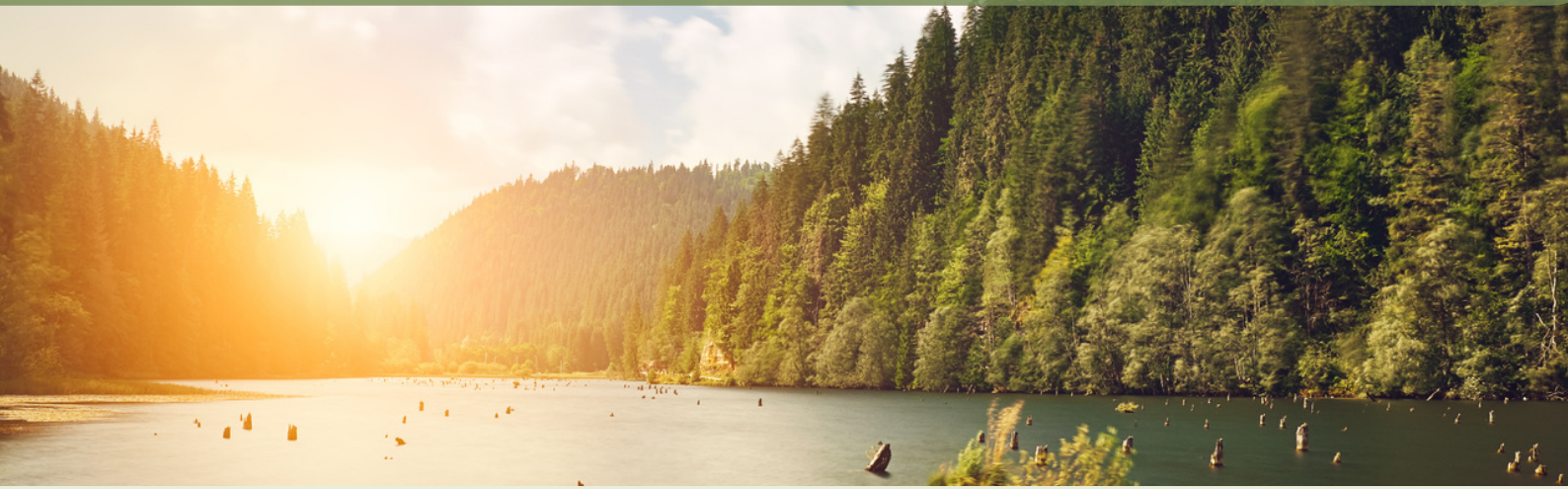


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Sermon on the Mount: Introduction

Author

The Gospel of Matthew was written by **Matthew**, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, who was initially a **tax collector** – a profession with objectionable connotations in those days, and was then called by Jesus to be His **disciple** (Matt. 9:9-12). Given Matthew’s close interactions with Jesus and his skills of keeping accurate records as inferred from his profession, the Gospel of Matthew has been regarded as **a trustworthy and reliable eyewitness account of Jesus’ life and teachings**.

“The Sermon on the Mount” (also called “The Teaching on the Hill”) is the first of five major discourses of Jesus that Matthew included in his Gospel. Jesus’ sermon went **from Matthew chapters 5 to 7 as one full teaching, and should be viewed as a whole**.

Audience

“The Sermon on the Mount” was given primarily to **Jesus’ disciples** (i.e. **those who were following and learning from Jesus**, not limited to the twelve apostles) and the crowds that started following Jesus since Matthew 4. At that time, Israel was under Roman rule and oppression, and the Jews were longing for the arrival of “the Kingdom of God” as promised in the Old Testament, but **most of them did not have a correct understanding of what the Kingdom is and how to enter into the Kingdom** — they thought the Messiah would be a political leader, and obedience to the laws and rules was of utmost importance for entering into the Kingdom. Jesus’ teaching, which began with “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3), was to correct the Jew’s misconceptions of the Kingdom of God.

Location

The exact location of the mountain described in Matt 5:1 is unknown, though likely to be in Galilee. Jesus’ teaching on the mountain echoed how Moses received and presented the Ten Commandments to the Israelites (Exodus 19–20) — from a mountain, Moses received and presented the Law to the Israelites, calling for obedience; also from a mountain, Jesus taught and explained the Law to His followers, calling for heart transformation beyond behavioral modification.

Theme

As you read along “The Sermon on the Mount”, you will see a lot of “dos and don’ts”, but this does not mean Jesus was preaching a salvation that is based on performance. On the contrary, **the extremely high standards that Jesus taught simply made it impossible for anyone to attain by his/her own effort, and hence our need for Jesus Christ.**

“If men are seeking salvation by human effort then this sermon can only condemn them, for it presents a standard of righteousness even higher than the law of Moses, and thus exposes the hopelessness of the sinner to attain to it. But he who confesses his sinfulness and in faith turns to Christ and obeys the instruction given here, builds upon a rock which cannot be shaken.” (Harry A. Ironside, Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew, 59)

Summary: “The Sermon on the Mount” was given to clarify the true nature of righteousness in Christ (“being” over “doing”), to convey the values of the Kingdom of God, and to teach the way of Christian living and interactions with one another. Christianity is not about behavioral modification, but heart transformation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Structure

Principles

- **5:1-16 – Overview** (*week 1*)
 - This section contains the famous Beatitudes (“Blessed are the . . .”) and the description of Christian characters as “salt and light”, which sets the foundation for the Sermon.

Practices

- **5:17–5:48 – Conducting oneself** (*weeks 1-2*)
 - This section brings out the examination of our hearts through six illustrations of the Law. The essence is in our being, not our doing.
- **6:1-34 – Interacting with others** (*weeks 4-5*)
 - This section is about how we conduct ourselves in light of others, including religious behaviors and approaches to wealth.
- **7:1-12 – Approaching God** (*week 7*)
 - This section is about how we see and approach God as the Father and the Judge, including the famous “ask, seek, knock” passage.

Priorities

- **7:13-29 – Conclusion** (*week 8*)
 - Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount by warning listeners of true v.s. false prophets; true v.s. false disciples; wise v.s. foolish builders.

**Weeks 3 and 6 are special weeks with guides on worship and prayer.*



Week 1: Matthew 5:1-20

Warm-up question

What makes you feel “blessed” today?

Read Matt 5:1-12

Matt 5:3-10 is known as “**the Beatitudes**”. These eight statements should be read as a whole as a **coherent description of a Christian’s character**. They follow the structure of “*Blessed are the ... for ...*”

- The English word “beatitude” comes from the Latin word *beatus*. The Greek word μακάριος (*makarios*) means “blessed” and refers to a happy condition.
- The word “for” gives the reason. They are blessed as they will participate in the Kingdom of God. The basis for each blessing is the fulfilment of an aspect of the Kingdom of God.

1. Read Matt 5:3-6 and describe in your own words: Who are “blessed” and why are they “blessed”? How is this different from how the world defines “blessed”?

- Note: “Poor in spirit” (5:3) does not mean lacking in spirit, but is the recognition of one’s unworthiness before God and complete dependence on God’s mercy and grace. “Those who mourn” (5:4) do so because they sense their spiritual poverty. **Do you consider yourself “poor in spirit”? Why or why not?**

2. Some might argue that even a non-believer can live out Matt 5:7-10. How would you respond to that? What are the potential problems if one tries to live out Matt 5:7-10 without Matt 5:3-6 or without faith in Christ?

Note: While Matt 5:3-6 focuses on the internal (self-awareness and attitudes), Matt 5:7-10 moves to the external (behaviors and actions) which flows from the internal.

- The “merciful” (5:7) shows mercy to others as they recognise their need for God’s mercy.
- The “pure in heart” (5:8) manifests undivided love for God.
- The “peacemakers” (5:9) are not those who avoid conflicts but are those who bring people into relationship with God where they can anticipate and experience shalom.
- The “persecuted” (5:10) are willing to be persecuted for Christ’s sake as they thirst for true righteousness in Christ (linking back to 5:6).

3. (Optional) Imagine that you were one of the Jews in Jesus’ days (see the “Audience” section in the “Introduction”), how would you feel about the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10)? How would the Beatitudes challenge your understanding of who can enter the Kingdom of God?

4. Matt 5:11-12 expands and clarifies the last Beatitude (Matt 5:10). What oppositions, insults, and persecutions do Christians still face today? Have you encountered something similar because of your Christian faith? How did you respond?

Read Matt 5:13-16

5. Based on Matt 5:13-16, consider the nature and usage of “salt” and “light”, and explain why they are qualities of Christians. So how can you be “salt” and “light” in your everyday life?

- Note: Salt was an important commodity in the ancient Near East as it flavours food and also prevents the decay of food.
- Jesus said in John 8:12, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*
- *“Salt and light balance each other. Salt is hidden: it works secretly and slowly. Light is seen: it works openly and quickly. The influence of Christian character is quiet and penetrating. The Influence of Christian conduct is obvious and attracting. The two go together and reinforce each other.”* (Warren W. Wiersbe, *Live Like a King*, 156-57)

Read Matt 5:17-20

Note: In Matt 5:17, “the Law and the Prophets” was how Jews usually referred to the Old Testament. When Jesus said He did not come to abolish them but to fulfill them, this means:

- (1) He was not changing the Old Testament, but was revealing the heart of it;
- (2) the Law actually exposed our flaws and inability to save ourselves from sin; and
- (3) the Old Testament was pointing to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The context of Matt 5:18-19 was that some Jewish teachers would regard certain commands and laws in Scripture to be more authoritative than others, resulting in selective obedience and superficial righteousness. The true righteousness that Jesus was teaching begins internally in one’s character and outflows externally through one’s conduct, and such transformation is only possible with the help of the Holy Spirit that indwells us as we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

6. Think of an incident when you have selectively obeyed or disobeyed a biblical teaching or principle. (E.g. “The Bible says we should not curse (James 3:10) but I’m just cussing in private and not cursing anyone?) What excuse did you make for yourself? Why is it so hard to “be good”?

7. Knowing that all of Scripture, including the Old Testament, points us to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and that only through faith in Jesus Christ that true transformation can occur, how does that impact the way you look at your Christian faith and live out your Christian identity?



Week 2: Matthew 5:21-48

Note: It is important to read through “Introduction” and “Week 1” before discussing the questions for Week 2, as the first half of Matthew 5 provides an essential foundation for understanding and interpreting the rest of the chapter (and in fact, the rest of the Sermon on the Mount).

In **Matt 5:21-48**, Jesus gave 6 illustrations (that can be understood as a whole) based on Old Testament laws and traditions. They largely follow this structure:

(1) The Old Testament law/tradition in question – the behavior problem

- Jesus often began with “you have heard that . . .” as many people at that time could not read and could only hear and follow what the teachers of the law said, hence the possibility of false understanding and misinterpretation.

(2) The correct interpretation and application – the heart problem

- This is when Jesus said “but I tell you . . .” This echoes what Jesus said in Matt 5:17 that He did not come to abolish the laws but to fulfill them – revealing the heart of the laws and pointing people to their sin and their need of the Messiah.

(3) Implied conclusion – the need for real transformation

- Jesus did not make this explicit, but the extremely high standards that He taught simply made it impossible for anyone to attain by his/her own effort. Instead, a heart transformation is necessary, which is only possible through believing and following Jesus Christ wholeheartedly.

Important: Our salvation is by God’s grace through our faith in Christ, not by our works (Eph 2:8-9). Living our lives in accordance with Matt 5:21-48 is not a condition to be saved (*not to mention that it’s almost impossible!*) but a fruit that should naturally develop in our lives as we undergo the process of transformation and sanctification to be more like Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Warm-up question

Share the strangest “rule” that you were asked to obey (e.g. school rule, parental rule, office rule).

Read Matt 5:21-26 – Murder

This law was from Exodus 20:13 (the sixth of the Ten Commandments) and Numbers 35:30.

1. According to Jesus, what is the root cause or underlying issue beneath the crime of murder? Why should people “settle matters quickly” and reconcile with their adversary?

- Note: Read these Bible verses to understand more about the problem of anger and the heart of reconciliation: Leviticus 19:17-18; James 1:19-20; Hebrews 12:14-15; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19.

Read Matt 5:27-30 – Adultery

This law was from Exodus 20:14 (the seventh of the Ten Commandments).

2. Jesus’ teaching in Matt 5:29-30 was hyperbolic and metaphorical (not to be taken literally - *phew!*), but what does that tell you about the root and the seriousness of the problem in question? What are some ways that you can adopt to avoid falling into temptations in your everyday lives?

Read Matt 5:31-32 – Divorce

This law was from Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which allowed a husband to divorce his wife (due to “displeasing” matters, generally referred to sexual immorality) by giving her a certificate that allowed her to remarry. As Jesus further explained in Matt 19:1-9, two become one in marriage and are not supposed to be separated; that Old Testament law was only given to regulate the practice of divorce, not to encourage it. Jesus’ main point was to highlight the true nature of marriage, not discussing the grounds of divorce.

3. Read Genesis 2:23-24, Malachi 2:14-16, and Matt 19:1-9, and describe God’s design for human marriage in one sentence. Share your thoughts on how the world looks at “marriage” and “divorce” nowadays, and whether you agree or disagree with it.

Read Matt 5:33-37 – Oaths

This law was a combination of Exodus 20:7, 20:16, Leviticus 19:12, Numbers 30:2, and Deuteronomy 23:21-23. However, some teachers of the law would teach that swearing by God’s name was binding, but swearing by heaven and earth or by Jerusalem was not, so they could “make an oath” and not honouring it.

Matt 5:37 can be translated as: *Simply let your “Yes” be “Yes”, and your “No” be “No”.* In fact, a person of integrity will not even need an oath to prove his/her trustworthiness, but will always fulfill his/her promises.

4. (Optional) Have you made a “casual oath” before? (E.g. “I swear that I will throw out the trash today.”) Did you fulfill it? In your experience, what type of promises is the hardest to keep?

Read Matt 5:38-42 – Eye for Eye

This law came from Leviticus 24:19-20 (*lex talionis*, the law of retaliation). It was intended as a maximum penalty for inflicting injuries, so people would not over-penalise the wrongdoers; it was not to encourage revenge. Also, slapping someone *on the right cheek* (Matt 5:39) was an act of humiliation in that context, and not intended to cover all violence. Jesus’ main point was this: *Do not take justice into your own hands.*

5. God is the ultimate Judge and only He is entitled to judge (James 4:12; Romans 12:17-21) and He will bring forth righteousness (Psalm 37; Revelation 21). In what areas do you trust, or struggle to trust, in God’s righteousness and justice? How should we as believers and ambassadors of Christ respond to suffering and injustice in this world, especially in light of Matt 5:40-42?

Read Matt 5:43-47 – Love for Enemies

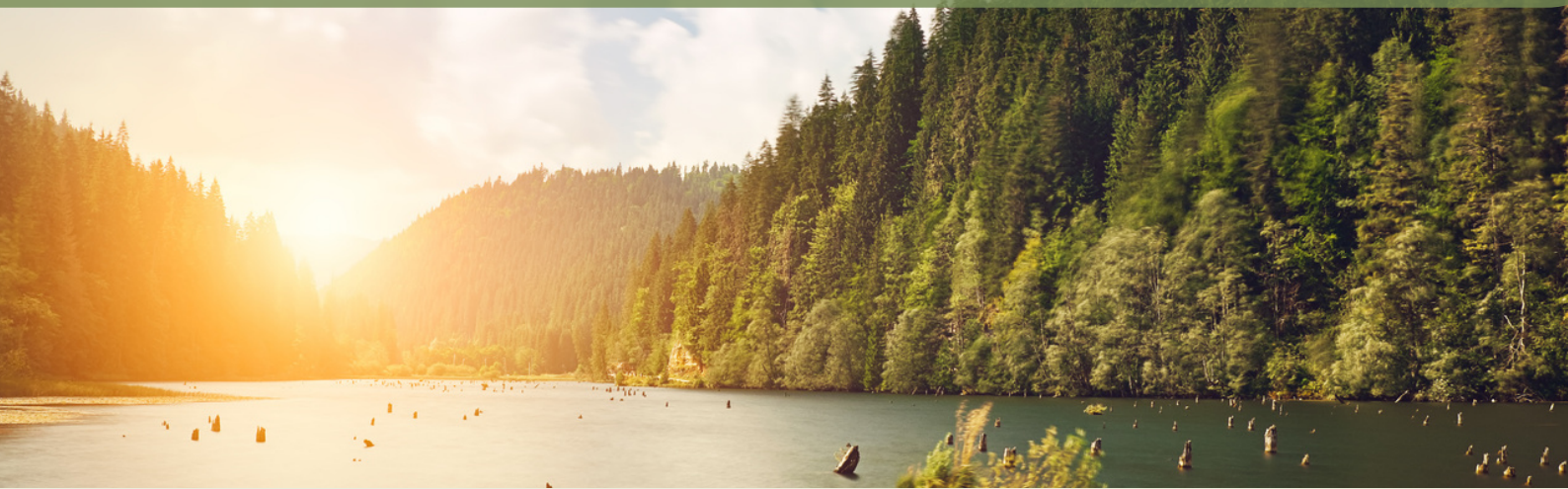
“Love your neighbor” was from Leviticus 19:18 and is one of the Great Commandments in Matt 22:34-40; but “hate your enemy” was not from Scripture, and was probably added by the teachers of the law.

6. According to Matt 5:45-47, why should we love and pray for our enemies? How did Jesus demonstrate this in His life on earth? Is there anything that prevents you from praying for your “enemies” right now?

Read Matt 5:48 – Short conclusion

7. Read Matt 5:48 together with Matt 5:20. Can we really attain this standard of perfection and righteousness by our own means? What does Jesus actually want us to recognise and pursue?

8. (Optional) Review the 6 illustrations (Matt 5:21-47) in light of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10). How can the attitude and posture portrayed in the Beatitudes lead to the godly behaviors in these 6 illustrations?



Week 3: Worship & Prayer Guide

Having studied Matthew 5 in the previous weeks, this week we have prepared a worship and prayer guide with content drawn from the Sermon on the Mount for you and your small group to do together.

Prayer is more than presenting our requests to God. Prayer is a 2-way communication between God and us, and every good relationship is dependent upon good communication. There is a popular prayer guide with the acronym **A-C-T-S**, which stands for **adoration**, **confession**, **thanksgiving**, and **supplication**. Let's integrate some lessons from Sermon on the Mount into A-C-T-S, pray and worship with your small group.

Step 1: Adoration

Adoration is to adore our Triune God, to praise Him for who He is, and to live out the Great Commandment of loving Him with all our heart, mind, and soul.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said **He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil them** (Matt 5:17). We have learned in Week 1 that this statement entails:

- (1) Jesus was not changing the Old Testament, but was revealing the heart of it;
- (2) the Law exposed our flaws and inability to save ourselves from sin; and
- (3) the Old Testament was pointing to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and our need for Him.

So how much do we know about Jesus Christ? How much do we see Him as the Messiah and the Savior?

Here are some of the names of Jesus Christ in the Bible:

- Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)
- Jesus (“God saves”) (Matt 1:21)
- Emmanuel (“God with us”) (Matt 1:23)
- Son of Man (Mark 2:10)
- Son of God (Luke 1:35)
- The Messiah, the Lord (Luke 2:11)
- The Savior of the world (1 John 4:14)
- The Bread of Life (John 6:35)
- The Light of the World (John 8:12)
- The Door (John 10:9)
- The Good Shepherd (John 10:11)
- The Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25)
- The Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)
- The Vine (John 15:5)
- Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8)

Worship & prayer exercise:

- **Group prayer:** Each person will take turns and pray out loud: “Jesus, I praise You for You are _____” (you may choose from the above list). If possible, the whole group may repeat this 3-4 times. Treat this as your act of worship – adoring and praising Jesus Christ together.
- **Individual prayer:** Write a letter to Jesus with words of praise, focusing on His names, His character, or His stories – everything about who Jesus is.

Oftentimes our tendency is to shift our focus back to ourselves too quickly, e.g., “Jesus, I praise You for You are __, so please help me with __.” While there is nothing wrong with this prayer, let’s hold off our requests for now (they will be covered in Step 4), and focus on Jesus first – simply praise and adore Him. You will gradually encounter a shift in your posture of prayer – experience who He is, and be drawn closer to Him.

Step 2: Confession

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Matt 5:3-4)

We have learned in Week 1 that the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10) should be read as a whole as a coherent description of a Christian’s character. The **“poor in spirit”** are those who are aware of their spiritual poverty, i.e. how they have fallen short of God’s glory and are in need of God’s mercy, and **“those who mourn”** are mourning over their sin and the sin of the world. Reading the Beatitudes as a whole provides a good basis for prayers of confession and repentance.

The Greek for **“confession”** (homologeō, e.g. 1 John 1:9) means to speak in accordance, to assent or agree with. It is to admit or declare oneself guilty. The Greek for **“repentance”** (metanoia, e.g. Romans 2:4) means a change of mind or purpose. It is to fully turn back to God without reservation or excuse.

Prayer exercise:

- **Group prayer / prayer in pairs:** Read the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10) together. To the extent that your group feels safe and comfortable, each person will say a short prayer of confession and repentance:
 - Confession: “God, I am sorry for ____.”
 - Repentance: “God, I am ready to turn back to You and I commit to ____.”
- **Individual prayer:** Read the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10) slowly, then make a prayer of confession and repentance to God.

Step 3: Thanksgiving

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Matt 6:26)

In Week 5, we will look into how God is our provider, and if we truly trust in His provision, we should not worry about things like money and possessions, but can seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:25-34). The heart of “not worrying” is to recognize that all we have is from God; He is the owner, we are the stewards. **So how often do we recognise and thank God for His provision?**

The subtle difference between adoration (Step 1) and thanksgiving (Step 3) is that, adoration focuses more on “who God is”, while thanksgiving focuses more on “what God has done”. Let’s now practise giving thanks to God for His provision, His generosity, and His love, and let’s be specific about it too.

Worship & prayer exercise:

- **Group prayer:** Read Matt 6:19-34 together, then each person will pray out loud: “Heavenly Father, I thank You for providing me with ____.” Treat this as your act of worship – thanking God while remembering Him as our Creator and Provider.
- **Individual prayer:** Read Matt 6:19-34 slowly, then reflect and pray about these questions: What is the “treasure” that truly matters to you? What are you worrying about right now? How has God been revealing Himself to you and providing for you? What do you want to thank God for?

Step 4: Supplication

“Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (Matt 6:8) “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt 6:33)

We will learn more about “prayer” in Week 4. One of the common questions is: If God already knows what I need before I say it, then why do I still need to pray?

As mentioned at the beginning, every good relationship is built upon good communication. Prayer is not so much about merely presenting our requests to God, but a process of communicating with God while aligning our hearts with His heart, through which we get to know and experience Him more and be drawn closer to Him.

Prayer exercise: *Lectio divina* (“divine reading”) is a contemplative way of reading the Bible. A passage is read out slowly and repeatedly, for everyone to listen, digest, and meditate.

- **Group prayer:** Assign a person to read out the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9-13). Give the following prompts for the group before each reading:
 - First reading: Simply listen and receive every word of it.
 - Second reading: Which word/phrase from the Lord’s Prayer stood out to you?
 - Third reading: How does this word/phrase, as well as the Lord’s Prayer, relate to your current circumstances and your current relationship with God?

End with a time of intercession (sub-divide into smaller groups if needed): Building on your reflection on your current relationship with God from the above *lectio divina*, how would your prayers change? With this in mind, share your requests with one another, and pray for each other.

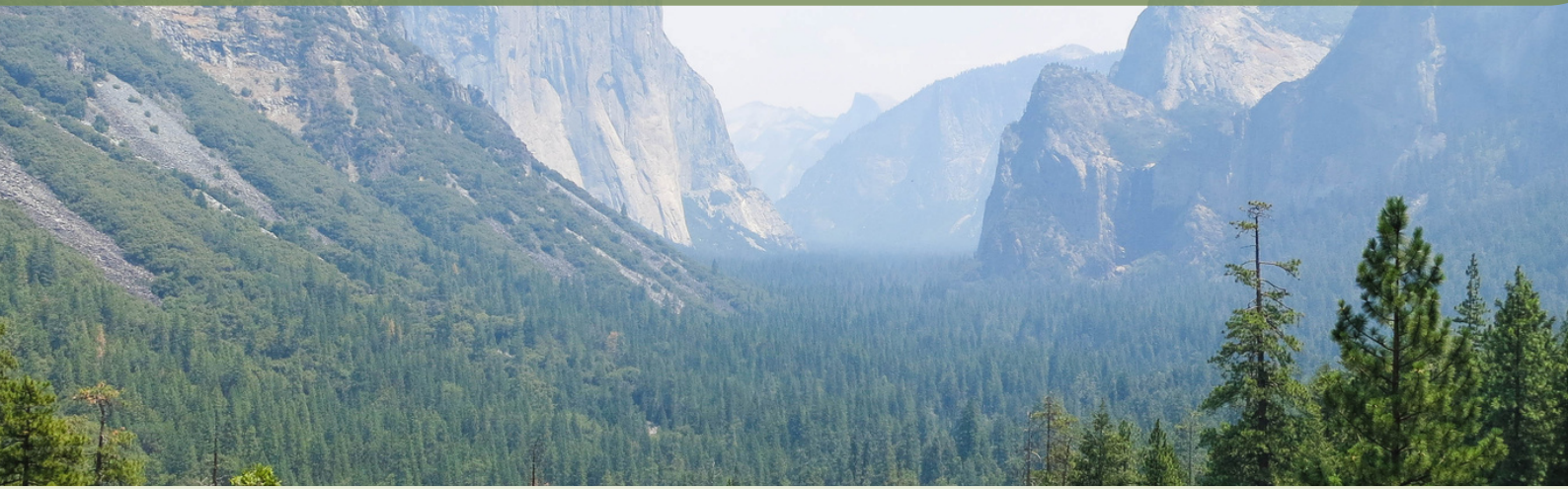
- **Individual prayer:** Read the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9-13) line by line, and pause for 30 seconds in between each line. Allow yourself to fully focus on and be immersed in every line of the Lord’s Prayer. Repeat this for 3 times. Observe any changes in your heart and mind, and journal your thoughts. End with a prayer of supplication – presenting your requests to God while also relying on and surrendering to His will, aligning your heart with His heart.

*“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one,
for yours is the kingdom and the power
and the glory forever.*
Amen.”*

(Matt 6:9-13)

**Some late manuscripts contained this line,
though not all translations included it.*

Reflection / Notes



Week 4: Matthew 6:1-18

In Week 2, we saw how Jesus pointed out people’s misconceptions about the laws (Matt 5:21-48). This week, we will see how Jesus pointed out **people’s misconceptions about religious conducts and rituals**. Jesus’ teaching flows from negative behaviors to positive behaviors, but the emphasis is the same – the **real issue lies in our heart, not in our behaviors**. All spiritual disciplines, including giving, prayer and fasting, should be done **for glorifying God instead of glorifying oneself**.

It is important to read through the “Introduction” and previous weeks’ guides beforehand, as Matt 5 provides an essential foundation for understanding the entire Sermon on the Mount.

Warm-up question

What is the funniest / silliest thing you did *in secret* during your childhood? (E.g. Spending money on Pokemon cards instead of stationery?) **How did that make you feel?**

Read Matt 6:1-4 – Overall principle & giving

1. What is the difference between the manner of giving by the “hypocrites”, and the manner of giving taught by Jesus? In Matt 5:14-16, Jesus taught believers to be “the light of the world” and show others their good deeds in public; but why did Jesus say our giving should be done “in secret” in Matt 6:2-4?

- Note: “Do not let your left hand know” is a metaphor for keeping things secret (or “lowkey” as Gen Z would say) and not for pleasing others or oneself.
- Reminder: We should not think of “secrecy” as transactional like “if we do it in secret then God will reward us”. Instead, we should treat “secrecy” as a means to guard our heart and check our intention: Do we care if anyone knows it or not? Are we truly doing it for the glory of God?

Further notes:

- Both Matt 6:1 and Matt 5:6 refer to “righteousness”. True righteousness is the status when we are justified before God, and due to our sinful nature, this is only attainable through our faith in Jesus, not through our good behaviors.
- The word “reward” is repeated throughout the passage. When religious conduct is done for one’s own glory, Jesus said they have already “received their reward in full” (6:2, 6:5, 6:16) – if we do it to get people’s praise, we will get people’s praise, but nothing more. The true, eternal reward lies in our citizenship in His Kingdom, which is in line with the true “blessedness” mentioned in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10) – “blessed are . . . for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”.
- The concepts of true righteousness and eternal reward are inseparable: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt 6:33)

Read Matt 6:5-15 – Prayer

2. Jesus was not against praying publicly with other people (e.g. Matt 18:19-20). **Jesus was also not against praying time after time** (e.g. persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8; “pray without ceasing” in 1 Thess 5:17). **So what was the real issue that Jesus was addressing? How does praying without being known or admired by others (Matt 6:6) affect our heart and focus when praying?**

3. (Optional) God already knows what we need before we ask Him (Matt 6:8), so why do we still pray? Knowing that God is all-knowing, how does that influence the way you pray?

- Hint: Think about the relationship and dynamics between parents and their young children.
- Note: What is the heart and purpose of prayer? Re-visit the content of Week 3 if needed.

4. Jesus introduced the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9-13) as a model or example, not as a compulsory form or a “magical formula”. How would you describe (a) the structure and (b) the theme of this model prayer? How can you apply this structure and theme in your own prayer life?

- Hint: The first half (Matt 6:9-10) is our adoration of God, and the second half (Matt 6:11-13) is our petitions to God. What is the significance of this sequence?
- Note: The Lord’s Prayer starts with an intimate address of “Our Father”, which was uncommon for believers at that time to do so until Jesus taught it. We should recognise God as both our sovereign Ruler and our loving Father. The Lord’s Prayer is also given in the context of the coming Kingdom of God – declaring the coming of the Kingdom and preparing ourselves in light of it.

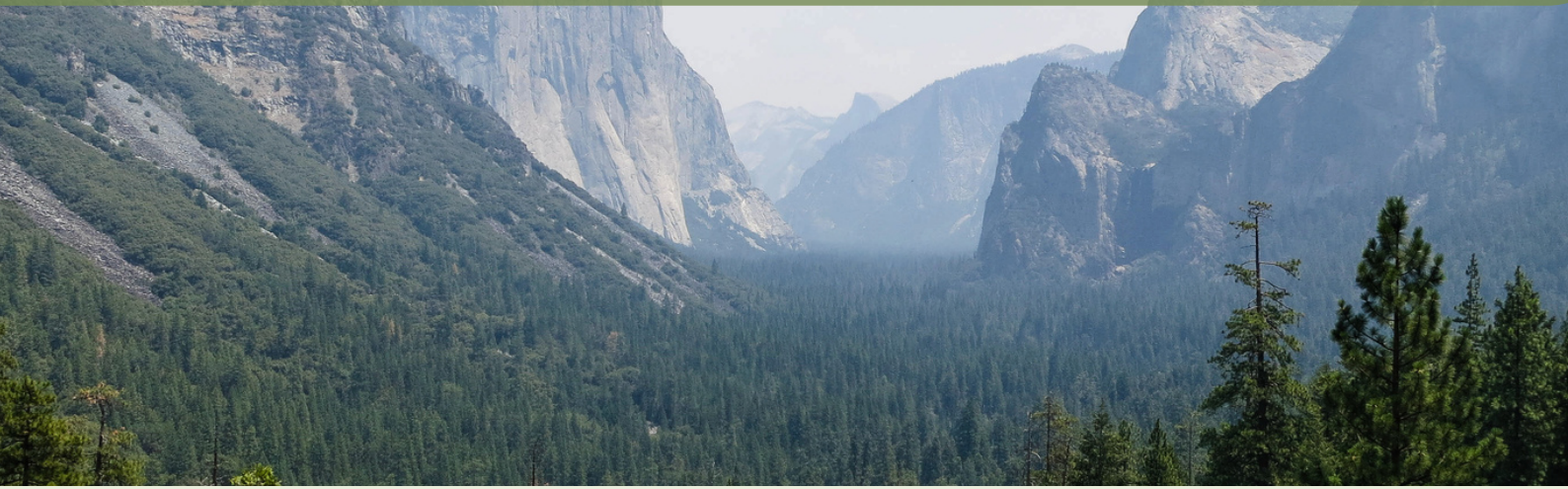
The Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9-13)	Reflection questions
Our Father in heaven	Do you recognise God as your Father?
Hallowed be your name	Do you want the world to know God?
Your kingdom come	Do you recognise God’s reign over your life and the world?
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven	Do you desire to do God’s will?
Give us today our daily bread	Do you depend on God as your Provider on an everyday basis?
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors	Are you willing to show mercy to others just as how God shows mercy to you? (See also Matt 5:7, 5:23-26, 18:21-35)
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one	Are you aware of your sinful nature and the sin of this world, and are you actively depending on God in trials / challenges?
For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.	How can you glorify God in your everyday life?

Read Matt 6:16-18 – Fasting

5. What is the difference between the manner of fasting by the “hypocrites”, and the manner of fasting taught by Jesus? How does that echo Jesus’ teachings on giving and prayer in the previous verses?

- Note: The spiritual discipline of “fasting” means the abstinence from food for a specific period of time while seeking God, in order to foster humility and a stronger focus on God. As some put it: “starve the flesh, feed the spirit.” It has been a common practice among believers (e.g. Lev 23:27-32; Acts 13:2, 14:23).
- “Put oil on your head and wash your face” (Matt 6:17) refers to regular acts of life as an orderly person, as opposed to pretentiously acting miserable or despairing.

6. (Optional) What is one spiritual discipline that you can commit to practice “in secret” this week, for the purpose of glorifying God and growing closer to Him?



Week 5: Matthew 6:19-34

In Week 4, Jesus contrasted heavenly reward and earthly reward when illustrating the correct and incorrect intentions of giving, praying, and fasting (Matt 6:1-18). Building on the theme of true reward, Jesus moved on to talk about treasures and possessions. He again invited us to examine our hearts and our priorities.

It is important to read through the “Introduction” and previous weeks’ study guides beforehand, as they provide an essential foundation for understanding the entire Sermon on the Mount.

Warm-up questions

- (a) If a huge fire breaks out in your bedroom and you are only allowed to bring one thing with you as you evacuate (in addition to your mobile phone), what will that be?
- (b) In your everyday life, what/who makes you worried? How do you usually handle your worries?

Read Matt 6:19-24

1. What is the problem with storing treasures on earth but not in heaven? What makes most people prioritise the former over the latter? How does that reflect one’s level of trust in God?

- Hint: The Apostle Paul illustrated a similar concept in 1 Tim 6:6-10. Money in itself is not evil. The Bible contains multiple verses that encourage people to work hard and save up for contingency (Prov 6:6-8) and to enjoy life and be glad (Eccl 8:15).
- Note: The meaning of “treasures in heaven” should be considered alongside “blessedness” in Matt 5:3-10 and “reward” in Matt 6:1-18, which is centered on the Kingdom of God.

2. In Matt 6:22, the Greek word for “healthy” (ἀπλοῦς / *haplous*) implies being single-minded toward God, without reserve, and generous. So how do “unhealthy eyes” in Matt 6:23 relate to the problem in Matt 6:24? Why is it not possible to serve God and money at the same time?

Read Matt 6:25-34

3. According to Jesus, what is the reason for “do not worry” (Matt 6:25)? What are the common characteristics of birds, flowers, and grass, and what was Jesus pointing out by comparing them with human beings?

- Hint: Matt 6:25 starts with “therefore...” so this is a conclusion drawn from the preceding verses.
- Note: Jesus was certainly not calling us to be lazy and do nothing. God is not against a hardworking person – work was part of the original order of God's creation (Gen 2:15), and laziness was often criticized (Prov 6:6-11).

4. “Food” and “clothes” in Matt 6:25 and 6:28 point to our worries and concerns of our daily needs and material things. Are there things that you currently feel worried or anxious about? How does that reflect your relationship with God?

5. According to Matt 6:32-34, what should be your priorities in life? How does the Lord's Prayer (especially Matt 6:10-11) reflect that? What are some potential challenges in pursuing that?

- Note: Both Matt 6:11 and Matt 6:34 emphasise our *daily* reliance on God for our *daily* needs. There is nothing wrong with doing long-term planning, but our willingness to follow God's will daily and trust in God's daily grace is a posture of humility and reverence to God, which draws us closer to God.

6. What are some practical ways to apply Matt 6:33-34 in your daily life as an antidote to your worries and anxieties?

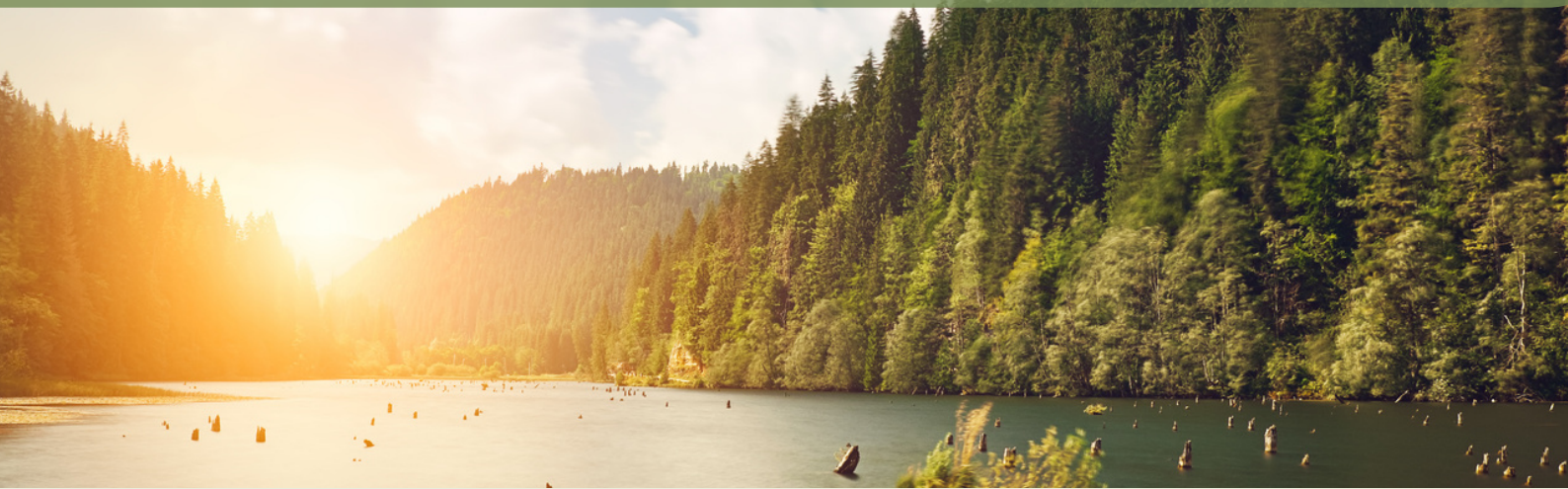
*If He dresses the lilies with beauty and splendor
How much more will He clothe you?
How much more will He clothe you?*

*If He watched over every sparrow
How much more does He love you?
How much more does He love you?*

*It's more than you ask, think or imagine
According to His power working in us
It's more than enough*

*Jireh, You are enough
Jireh, You are enough
I will be content in every circumstance
Jireh, You are enough*

(Lyrics from "Jireh" by Elevation Worship & Maverick City Music)



Week 6: Prayer Stations Guide

In many traditional, historical churches, you may be able to find various “Stations of the Cross” on their walls and pillars, i.e. a series of 14 pictures/carvings portraying 14 events leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion. People can visit these stations one by one, going through the route of suffering and sacrifice by Jesus, while meditating and praying at each of them. This exercise stemmed from the practice of early Christian pilgrims who would visit the actual historic locations in Jerusalem and pay tribute to and worship the Lord.

Prayer stations can be powerful if they are structured carefully and biblically. They allow people to be freed from distractions, to fully immerse themselves in Scripture and prayer, and to be drawn closer to God. We have included below 10 ideas for prayer stations (some of them are based on the **Sermon on the Mount**) which are generally easy to set up. You can either set them up in a venue and invite your group members to go through the stations at their own pace, or select 4-5 of them and practice them as prayer exercises during your group gathering. These 10 prayer stations are by no means a “more effective” way of prayer, but **through stretching our perception of prayer and curating a space that focuses on prayer, the goal is to guide everyone to experience the power of prayer and a closer relationship with God.**

Prayer Station #1: The Lord’s Prayer

- Slowly read the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13) twice. The first time, read silently to yourself, and the second time, read it out. Pause and reflect on the meaning of each line.
- Copy down the prayer by hand onto a notecard. Add drawings to it if any imagery comes to your mind. As you copy the prayer, regard it as your prayer to God. If possible, memorise the Lord’s Prayer.
- As you recall and pray the Lord's Prayer from your heart, be cautious about the dangers of mindless repetition. Don't let it become a "mantra" or "chant" that is devoid of meaning. Remember that the Word of God is living and active (Heb 4:12) and praying Scripture is an ongoing conversation with Him.

(Materials: Notecards, markers/pens, Bible)

Prayer Station #2: Do not worry

- Create origami of birds and flowers. As you fold them, think about how God created them – their sophistication, their beauty, their lives.
- Read and reflect on Matt 6:25-34 – how Jesus described the birds of the air and flowers of the field.
- Pray to God based on these questions:
 - What are you worrying about right now?
 - How has God been revealing Himself to you?
 - Do you trust that God is your Provider? What is hindering you from trusting His provision?
 - Do you view God as the owner of everything you have, and you are the steward of these things?

(Materials: Origami paper, origami instructions - samples available [here](#))

Prayer Station #3: Pray in secret

- Read Matt 6:5-8.
- Enter into a separate room or an enclosed space (e.g. a camping tent) alone, with no one else. If no separate room is available, situate yourself at a corner facing the wall where you cannot see anyone.
- Spend 1 minute in silence, then start praying to God. No one will be able to hear what you are praying; only God knows. Be as genuine and vulnerable as you wish. Approach this time as a one-on-one intimate session with God.
- End with 1 minute of silence before you exit the room or leave the corner.

Prayer Station #4: The prayer labyrinth

The earliest record of a labyrinth (明陣) within a church dated back to 342 C.E. in North Africa. Labyrinths gained popularity in Europe during the Middle Ages. Although not mentioned in the Bible nor uniquely Christian in origin, labyrinths were embraced as spiritual tools to help individuals connect with and draw closer to God. Walking, or even dancing, through a labyrinth symbolises both the journey of faith and the pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem. Unlike a maze which contains dead-ends and trick routes to make you lost, the labyrinth features a single winding yet definite path that always leads to the centre.

- Use the index finger of your non-dominant hand to navigate the following paper labyrinth:
 1. Release and shed your burdens while moving towards the centre.
 2. Rest with God in the centre. Listen to what He has to say.
 3. Reimagine your life in light of what has been experienced as you move away from the centre. Give thanks to God.
- End with a prayer on this verse: *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me...” - John 14:6*

(Materials: Printed copies of paper labyrinth)



Prayer Station #5: Wash your dirt

- Read John 13:1-17 about Jesus washing His disciples' feet. Imagine Jesus is holding a jar of water in front of you and offering to wash and cleanse you. Pour some water to wash your hands and reflect: What “dirt” are you willing to let Jesus wash off from you?
- End with a prayer to surrender these things to Jesus and to seek His forgiveness and healing.

(Materials: Jar of water, basin, towel)

Prayer Station #6: Time in His hand

- “Silence” is one of the spiritual disciplines. It quiets down our heart, slows down our pace, and humbles us before God. There are times when God wants us to do something, but there are also times when God just wants us to be still and abide in Him.
- Turn an hourglass upside-down, then spend the time in silence (i.e. don’t do anything - don’t speak, don’t look at your phone, don’t read), until all sand goes from the top to bottom (5 minutes).
- End with a time of prayer on this verse: “Be still, and know that I am God” – Psalm 46:10

(Materials: Hourglass)

Prayer Station #7: Exchange the Word

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to inspire you with a Bible verse, and write it down on a post-it note.
- Leave it on the table for sharing. Read others’ verses, choose one to keep for yourself and pray on it.

(Materials: Bible, post-it notes, pens)

Prayer Station #8: Pray for the world

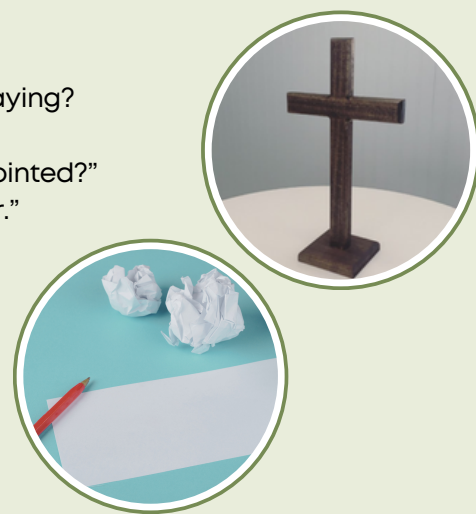
- Look at a world map, and pray that God will place a city in your heart. Then pray for that city.
- (Optional: search for more details about that city, e.g. population, ethnicity, religion, any major conflict or issue, conditions of Christians in that city [joshuaproject.net] and pray accordingly.)
- Pray for that place, write a note, then pin on the map.

(Materials: World map, post-it notes, pens, pins)

Prayer Station #9: Cast your obstacles

- Reflect on this question: What are the things that hinder you from praying?
 - Disbelief: “What difference does my prayer make anyway?”
 - Fear: “What if God never answers my prayer and I will get disappointed?”
 - Wound: “I experienced something hurtful in the past about prayer.”
 - Postponement: “Let me pray later when I have more free time.”
 - Numb: “Fine, I’ll just do it like a routine or ritual.”
- Write down your burdens / struggles, crumple the paper into a “ball”, then cast it at a small standing wooden cross. As you do so, pray that Jesus will heal / redeem / empower / encourage you.

(Materials: Small standing wooden cross, pens and paper)



Prayer Station #10: Time capsule

- In what areas do you want to grow closer to God in the next 12 months? Write down a prayer to God about your goals and needs in the next 12 months, and on how to enhance your relationship with God.
- Put your written prayer into an envelop, seal it, and write your address and name on the envelop.
- Assign a person to keep all people’s envelops, and mail it back to them in a year’s time.
- When you receive and re-read your prayer after a year, reflect on God’s work and presence with you.

(Materials: Letter paper, envelops, pens)

Debrief

After completing these prayer stations activities, spend some time as a group to debrief together:

- How do you feel as you meditate, reflect, and pray at different stations? Is there any particular station that you feel special about? How has God revealed Himself to you?
- How has this experience changed your perception and perspective of “prayer”?
- Is there anything inspired by these prayer stations that you can implement in your daily prayer life?

Reflection / Notes



Week 7: Matthew 7:1-12

In Weeks 4–5, we went through Jesus’ teaching on religious rituals (Matt 6:1-18) and handling treasures and worries (Matt 6:19-34), both centered on our heart and our priority: Are we focusing on our self-interest on earth, or are we willing to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matt 6:33)?

In the coming two weeks, we will cover Matt 7 which is the last chapter of the Sermon on the Mount. This week’s focus is on **“judging”** and **“asking”**, both illustrating **our interactions and relationship with God**.

It is important to read through “Introduction” and previous weeks’ guides beforehand, as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7) is one coherent sermon on one consistent theme: Christian living is not about behavioral modification but heart transformation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Warm-up question

If a colleague / friend / classmate of yours is not performing up to standard, how would you let him / her know without sounding “judgy”? Share a past experience if any.

Read Matt 7:1–6

The Greek word for **“judge”** (krinō) means deciding one thing over another, or determining the correctness of a matter.

1. Consider Matt 7:1-2 together with James 4:11-12. What is the heart issue of judging others? Are all forms of judgment forbidden?

- Hint: Matt 18:15-17 speaks of the need to point out the fault of a brother or sister, and Eph 4:15 talks about speaking the truth in love. How is that different from what Matt 7:1-2 is forbidding?
- Note: The Sermon on the Mount often stresses the importance of one’s motive in respect of a behavior, because the intention matters more (recalling the application of laws in Matt 5:21-48 and the performance of rituals in Matt 6:1-18).

2. Explain in your own words what Jesus was criticising in Matt 7:3-5 when he used metaphors of “sawdust” and “plank”. In particular, what is the person in Matt 7:3-4 truly concerned about? How can you “take the plank out of your own eye” in practice?

- Hint: Jesus did not prohibit the removal of sawdust *per se*; but removing sawdust from a person’s eye is a delicate procedure, and there is no way that a person with a plank in his eye can do it.

3. The “sacred” and the “pearls” in Matt 7:6 represent the good news of the Kingdom of God, while the “dogs” and “pigs” are people who reject it. What was Jesus’ attitude towards them? How do you reconcile this with the call to spread the gospel?

- Further reading: Matt 10:12-14 and 2 Tim 4:2-5.

4. How can spiritual disciplines and Christian communities help you counteract a judgmental spirit and cultivate a loving spirit towards others?

Read Matt 7:7-12

The Greek verbs for “ask”, “seek” and “knock” are all *imperatives* in Greek which signify commands. The progression from “ask” (present our requests), to “seek” (desire for His will), to “knock” (yearn to enter into His Kingdom despite circumstances) points to an increasing intensity and persistence of seeking and relying on God.

Further note: Matt 7:7-11 mirrors almost completely with Luke 11:9-13, except that Matt 7:11 refers to the “good gifts” given by the Father to us, while Luke 11:13 refers to the “Holy Spirit” given by the Father to us. So the ultimate “good gift” is actually the Holy Spirit, and we are all given the Holy Spirit when we put our faith in Christ (Eph 1:13-14). The best gift we can ever ask for is our salvation through Christ, and for us to be drawn closer to Him (echoing Matt 6:33).

5. Matt 7:7-11 doesn’t mean you will get everything you asked for, so what did Jesus really mean? In light of the Sermon on the Mount that you’ve studied so far (especially Matt 6), what shall we ask / seek / knock? What will we receive in return?

- Hint: Consider Matt 5:3-10, 6:8-13, 6:33.

6. In Matt 7:9-11, Jesus drew an analogy of us granting our child’s wishes and our Heavenly Father granting our wishes. Is it easy or hard for you to view God from this perspective? What are some struggles or challenges in trusting God to “give good gifts” to you?

7. Matt 7:12 serves as an interim conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. Explain in your own words why Matt 7:12 explains the heart of the Sermon on the Mount.

- Hint: Read the Great Commandment in Matt 22:36-40.



Week 8: Matthew 7:13-29

Last week, we went through Jesus’ teachings on “do not judge” and “ask... seek... knock...” which prompted us to evaluate our heart condition and our relationship with God: Do we truly see God as our ultimate Judge and also our dearest Father, who longs for us to seek Him?

Jesus made an interim conclusion in Matt 7:12 that “*so in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets*”, which echoed the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37-40) and brought out the heart of His teachings: love — which, again, is not a mere behavioral modification, but a fruit resulting from a heart transformation.

This week, we are covering the final portion of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus closed off with four pairs of alternatives, serving as both an invitation to the future Kingdom and a warning of the future judgment. The only way to the Kingdom is through our faith in Christ which transforms us and overflows into our way of living. This is the central theme of the entire Sermon on the Mount.

Warm-up question

Share an experience when you have bought a counterfeit product. How did you feel? Did you do anything about it?

Read Matt 7:13-14: Narrow and wide gates

Further note: The “small gate” and “narrow road” that “leads to life” refers to the only way of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone, which leads to the Kingdom of God.

A “wide gate” and “broad road” that “leads to destruction” may look something like: “just believe in God and you will get anything you want” (prosperity gospel), or “do all these religious things and you will be saved” (works-based gospel), or other forms of false gospels that will not save us.

1. Why did Jesus describe the gate and road that leads to life as “narrow”? What makes it difficult to pursue and hard to find?

- Hint: Read John 14:6, Matt 5:10-12, 6:24, 16:24-25, and Luke 9:57-62. Think about the challenges and sacrifices that a true believer and follower of Christ would encounter.

2. Do you consider your journey of seeking and following Jesus an easy or difficult one?

Read Matt 7:15-20: True and false prophets

In the Old Testament times, a “prophet” was a person chosen by God to speak the words of God, who had the authority of God and must be listened to. A person would be considered a “false prophet” if what he/she proclaimed in God’s name did not come true or would lead people to worship other gods, and would be punishable by death. (See Deut 18:18-22; 13:1-5.)

Jesus’ warnings here could also be applicable to those who proclaim a false gospel and mislead others. They might look like believers (“in sheep’s clothing”) but are actually dangerous (“ferocious wolves”), and would be subject to judgment (“cut down and thrown into the fire”).

3. How can one recognise a “false prophet” according to Matt 7:15-20? What “good fruit” would you see from a “true prophet”? Have you encountered a “good tree” bearing “good fruit” in your spiritual life?

- Note: A person’s behavior (fruit) reflects a person’s being (tree). In Galatians 5:22-25, Paul listed the fruit of the Spirit. There is only one “fruit” but with nine aspects, and the “fruit” is developed not by our own works but through the Spirit as we live by Him, hence the term “fruit of the Spirit”.

Read Matt 7:21-23: True and false disciples

4. Why will Jesus reject those people described in Matt 7:21-23 on the day of judgment, even though they proclaimed “Lord, Lord” and did works in Jesus’ name?

- Hint: Read James 2:19 and recall Jesus’ teachings in Matt 6:1-18 – how did Jesus distinguish between hypocrites and true believers?
- Note: Jesus’ response of “I never knew you” was not so much about His knowledge of that person, but the relationship between Him and that person. This prompts us to reflect on whether we are pursuing a personal and genuine relationship with Him, or merely doing works for Him and claiming the credits for ourselves.

5. According to Matt 7:21, who can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven? How can this be reconciled with Eph 2:8-9 and with the entire Sermon on the Mount that emphasises being over doing, grace over works?

- Hint: Read John 6:28-29 and 14:12. Think about what the Father’s will is concerning our salvation.

Read Matt 7:24-27: Wise and foolish builders

Further note: This is the last part of the Sermon on the Mount. Having given numerous illustrations and instructions to the disciples, Jesus closed it off by emphasising the importance of not just hearing His teachings but also living out His teachings. A true heart transformation through faith in Christ would naturally enable a person to live as such, as opposed to mere behavioral modifications and legalistic observances which will result in hypocritical living.

6. What types of believers do “house on the rock” and “house on the sand” represent? What does “rain... streams... winds...” symbolise?

- Note: This echoes what Jesus said in Matt 5:19. The importance of putting God’s words into practice was also explained in James 1:22-25 and 2:14-20.
- Hint: The meaning of “rain... streams... winds...” can be two-fold – it may refer to something within our current life, and also something beyond that (whether a “house” would stand still or crash will eventually be revealed on the day of judgment).

7. How would you describe the foundation of your “house” in light of this metaphor?

8. Looking back at the four pairs of contrasts in Matt 7:13-27 as a whole, how would you summarise the marks of a true follower of Christ? How can you cultivate them in your spiritual life?

Further note: Jesus started with a call to make the right choice (7:13-14), and ended with a call to put His teachings into practice (7:24-27). In between these two important calls were two risks that believers may face, namely the risk of going after false teachings (7:15-20) and the risk of believing in one's works (7:21-23).

Read Matt 7:28-29: Ending

The crowds were amazed at Jesus' teaching not simply because the content or delivery was great, but primarily because "he taught as one who had authority". Jesus came not only to explain the Law but to fulfill them (Matt 5:17). Jesus has the authority as the Son of God speaking on behalf of the Father (e.g. Matt 6:14-15) and the Messiah giving us access to the Kingdom of God (e.g. Matt 7:21-23).

Jesus Himself has made it possible for us to live out the Sermon on the Mount and experience real transformation and true blessedness as a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

9. Having studied the Sermon on the Mount from Matt 5 to Matt 7, what adjectives would you use to describe Jesus' teachings? How would you respond? How has the Sermon on the Mount helped with or influenced your faith, your relationship with God, and your way of living?

Reflection / Notes



The Sermon on the Mount Study Guide