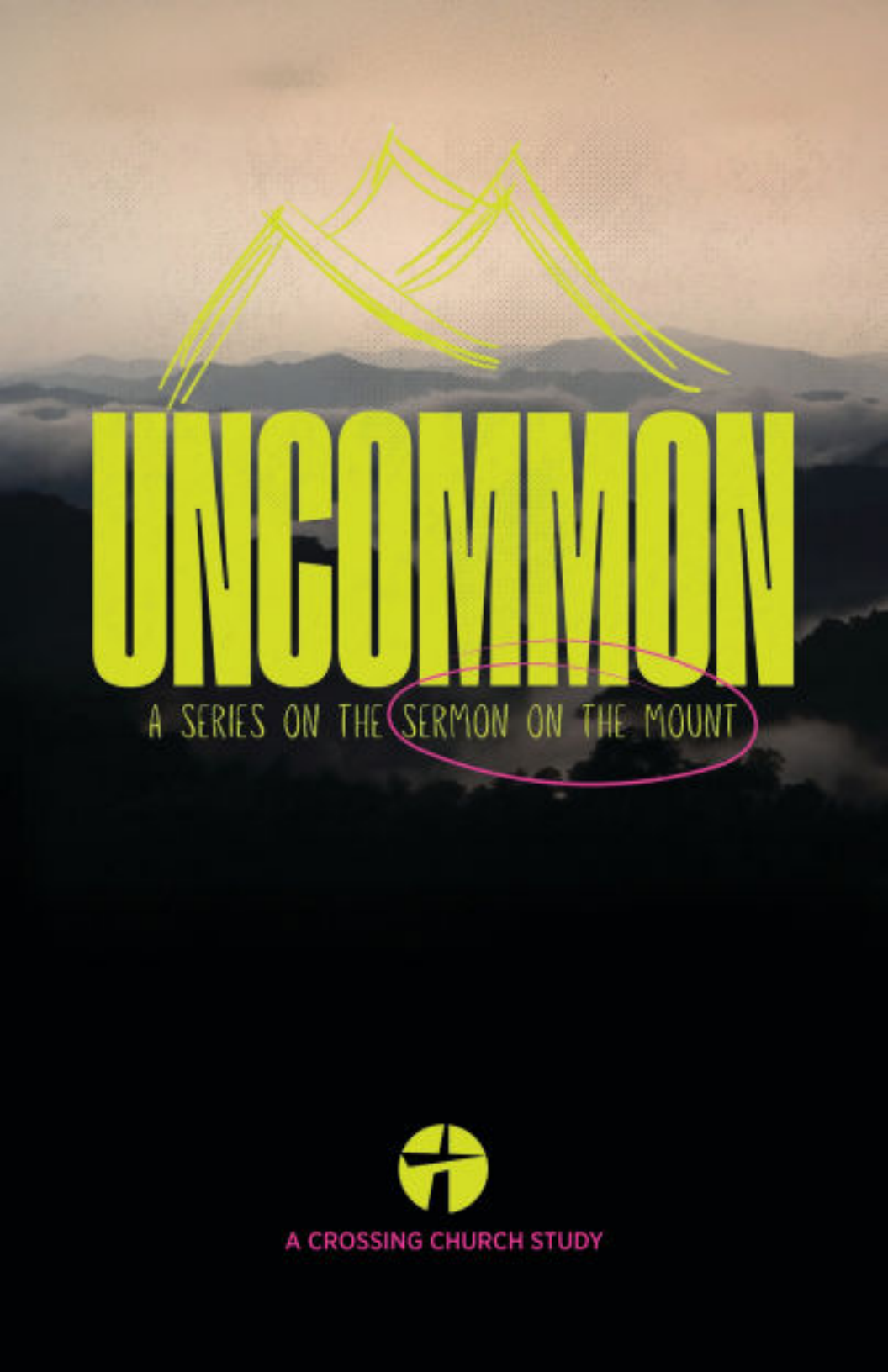

UNCOMMON
A SERIES ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
A CROSSING CHURCH STUDY

WELCOME

At The Crossing, we believe that God speaks to us through the Bible, not just to inform us, but to transform us. Scripture shapes our hearts, renews our minds, and changes the way we live and relate to others. Our teaching team has created this study with the hope that you won't just read the Sermon on the Mount but that you'll step into it and live it. That you'll experience the life-changing ways of Jesus for yourself. This devotional is a companion to our Sunday series, **Uncommon** - a journey through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It's designed for small groups, families, and personal study alike. Our prayer is that this helps you walk everyday with Jesus, in a new kind of way.

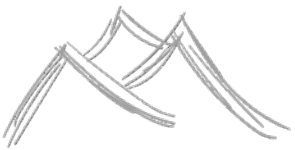
> The ways of Jesus are an open invitation to a new kind of life. The choice is ours.

Each week we will:

READ & REFLECT
Four days a week of reading and studying a short passage from the Sermon on the Mount or supporting scripture.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS
We hope you will join one of our small groups, which are designed to align with your personal season of life. Groups will meet each week, giving you the opportunity to discuss what you've been learning.

Our goal is for this resource to help you explore your faith and experience the life-changing ways of Jesus, wherever you are in your spiritual journey.



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https://bibleproject.com/guides/introduction-to-the-sermon-on-the-mount

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching. ~ Matthew 7:28

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) is Jesus' most concentrated teaching on what it means to live in the Kingdom of Heaven - not someday in the future, but here and now. It's an invitation into an uncommon way of life, one that looks radically different from the world around us.

Through these words, Jesus calls us to walk everyday with Him - to learn His rhythms, share His heart, and trust His way. This is not a checklist of religious rules, but a vision for a life rooted in God's love and empowered by His presence. It shapes who we are on the inside, so that generosity, forgiveness, humility, and courage naturally flow into how we treat others.

In these chapters, Jesus teaches us to live for an audience of One, to cultivate habits that draw us closer to God, to forgive as we have been forgiven, and to build our lives on the solid rock of His words. He paints a picture of life in the Kingdom where the poor in spirit are blessed, enemies are loved, prayer is honest, and every choice is grounded in love for God and neighbor.

The Sermon is an open invitation to anyone willing to step into this uncommon way of living - trusting that God's ways lead to strength, integrity, and a life that can withstand the storms. As we journey through these devotionals may we not simply hear Jesus' words, but also put them into practice, step by step, as we walk with Him.

THE BIBLE PROJECT BONUS INFO:

CONTEXT

Matthew places the Sermon on the Mount within his larger narrative about Jesus that takes place in Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee, and the surrounding occupied lands of the Greco-Roman Empire between approximately 4 B.C.E. and 35 C.E. The book was likely composed sometime between 55 and 90 C.E.

KEY THEMES

Renewing the human vision for the "good life"
Righteousness as right-relating with God and neighbors, including enemies
Real life in God's peaceful, generous kingdom

"Jesus' teachings are not just good ideas; they are the way to be human. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' manifesto for a whole new way to live."
- John Mark Comer

WEEK 1 NOTES

WEEK 1: Day 1

In 1994 the movie Forrest Gump premiered. It would go on to win best picture, best actor, best director, and best screen play. One of the many things that set Forrest Gump apart, was that it started at the end: Forrest, sitting on a park bench, looking back at his life. Starting the story at the end hooked audiences…it made us want to know how he got there.

And today, we are going to do the same with the Sermon on the Mount. We are going to start at the end.

Because, at the very end of the Sermon, Jesus gives us the reason why this message matters. It's because it points us to a better way of life. Jesus calls us to create a life of strength, purpose, and meaning.

Jesus ends with a parable which is a made up story with a very real point. Here at the very end, Jesus gives us the "WHY" behind the entire Sermon.

> *Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.* ~ Matthew 7:24-29

WHAT WE LEARN:

- No one escapes the storms of life. Both characters encounter the pain, fear and hardship of the storms of life. The same is true for us, we will encounter storms.

- Just hearing Jesus' Sermon won't help. The difference-maker in life, according to Jesus, is putting His words into practice. And that is our goal in this study, to take the words of Jesus, and put them into practice in our lives today.

QUESTIONS

Think about someone you know who has gone through a great hardship and came out the other side stronger. What happened to them? How did they come out stronger? How did that happen?

Think of a storm that came into your life that caused you pain; maybe it was a bad financial decision, a relationship you sabotaged. Use the space below to describe the storm you went through.

How did you make it through that storm? What people and practices helped you move through it?

WEEK 1: Day 2

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ~ Matthew 7:24

Yesterday we were introduced to two men who are both building their lives when a storm comes. Jesus says one man is wise and the other foolish. Now in our day, we think of wisdom as being smart. But for Jesus, wisdom has very little to do with intelligence, family of origin, or academic success. Wisdom, Jesus says, comes from putting his words into practice. This is a theme throughout the entire Bible.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. ~ Proverbs 1:7

The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice. ~ Proverbs 12:15

There is a way of Wisdom the Bible describes that involves us trusting God to guide and direct our lives. This means walking with Jesus and letting Him guide our words, relationships, finances, faith, feelings, worries and living out our everyday lives in a way that reflects His teaching.

Spiritual maturity, according to Jesus, is not just about knowing the facts about faith, but actually putting what we know in practice. There are lots of people out there who know lots of information about Jesus, but their lives don't look like Jesus. James, the brother of Jesus, picked up on this theme:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ~ James 1:22

So for us, over the next few weeks, the most important thing we can do is take the words of Jesus and put them into practice in our lives. Now, this does not mean we are perfect but that we become intentional about reading the words of Jesus and doing what He says.

QUESTIONS

Have you ever met someone who seemed to know a lot about the Bible but their life didn't look much like Jesus? Describe your experience with that person.

Now, take a moment and ask God, "Is there any area where I am not fully trusting the words of Jesus?" (It could be with your family, your finances, your time, in your romantic life, etc.). Take a moment and jot down any areas where you might have knowledge of God but lack follow-through.

Healing and growth often come through community. (This is why we talk about groups almost every week at The Crossing.) Is there someone you can share the above question with who will encourage you and spur you on towards growth?

WEEK 1: Day 3

The word "blessed" is potentially one of the most misunderstood words in the Bible. We use it to describe when someone's life looks easy on the outside: "He was blessed with a great income, she was blessed with great looks or a great work ethic." We think of blessings as the things that benefit us. However, that is not the way Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount. He uses this word nine times in a very different way.

Rich Villodas defines the word blessed this way: "To be accepted and approved by God, whether or not circumstances seem to confirm or deny it."

Jesus begins His message with an invitation to experience the blessings God offers and to experience God's acceptance and approval. Below we will read what is not a list of rules to follow but descriptions of people who God chooses to invite, welcome, and bless into His family"

> *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*
> ~ Matthew 5:6-12

THINGS TO NOTICE:

- The people who God invites and blesses don't seem like obvious choices for blessing (poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek). These are people who are often in the margins or overlooked.

- There is a wide variety of people who are blessed, meaning the invitation to experience the blessing of God is for everyone, not just a select few.

QUESTIONS

Take a few minutes and think through how you use the word “blessed”. How would you change your idea of being blessed based on how Jesus uses it?

Jesus invites people into His blessing who are often overlooked or see themselves as less than others. Can you think of a time when you felt left out or unimportant?

If you have said yes to the grace and invitation of Jesus, I want you to think about that moment. What did you feel? Why did you say yes to Jesus?

WEEK 1: Day 4

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. ~ Matthew 5:3

This first Beatitude (another name for the statements of blessing from Jesus) introduces us to a very important phrase: "The Kingdom Of Heaven."

Here's a definition: the Kingdom of Heaven is the open invitation to participate in the purpose and presence of God right here and now.

Not only does the invitation and blessing of God come to those on the margins and in need, but they also come with a purpose. Let's look at some of the Beatitudes again.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ~ Matthew 5:6-10

In each of these verses, Jesus highlights people who choose to take action and live in line with the purpose and heart of God here and today.

- **Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness:** Those who desire to fight for people who are oppressed.
- **The Merciful:** Those who are able to forgive and show compassion even to people who don't deserve it.
- **Pure in Heart:** Those who enter relationships at work, with their family or friends without any ulterior motives. They don't use people to get a leg up in the world.
- **Peacemakers:** This is different from a Peacekeeper, who often will avoid conflict to keep a generic peace. Peacemakers move towards conflict and hurt in order to pursue authentic reconciliation and peace that lasts.
- **Persecuted because of Righteousness:** Jesus says those who are harmed because of the good they do in Jesus' name are also blessed.

Each of these Beatitudes paints a picture of the Kingdom of Heaven. Notice that it is a place, not in the distant future, but available today and led by those who act and live like Jesus.

QUESTIONS

Can you think of a time when someone stood up for you in a difficult situation (maybe a boss after you made a big mistake, or a family member when you were a kid)? What happened to make this moment stick out to you?

Look at the five Beatitudes. Which best describes you today? Why?

Which one of the Beatitudes above offers you an opportunity to grow? What's one thing you can do today to put the words of Jesus into practice?

UNCOMMON

WEEK 2

WEEK 2

WEEK 2: Day 1

Salt is something we take for granted today, but this wasn't always the case. In his book *Salt: A World History*, Mark Kurlansky states that during the life of Jesus, salt was a very rare and precious resource. So when Jesus called His followers the "salt of the Earth" people would take notice. It would be like someone saying today, you are "the gold of the earth", or you are "the bitcoin of the digital world." It communicates meaning and value.

Jesus says:

> *You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.* ~ Matthew 5:13

Salt primarily does three things:

- **Salt preserves.** In a world without refrigerators, salt would keep food from decay and bacteria.
- **Salt heals.** It was common practice during the time of Jesus to put salt on an injury, as a way to kill germs and clean a wound.
- **Salt brings out the best**. Salt enhances the flavor of food. Think of french fries without salt, or potato chips without salt. Without salt, many foods would disappoint.

Jesus calls us to be salt to our world:

- **We preserve** and protect the world around us from moral decay. Rich Villodas says it this way: "We are to combat the decay of a broken world with the salt of our presence. Whether the decay is racism, poverty, gossip, relational dysfunction, or something else, Jesus calls us to preserve the good that exists."
- **We heal** our broken and hurting world. We seek to heal our broken relationships by offering forgiveness and asking for forgiveness for mistakes we have made. We strive to bring healing and hope to people in need.
- **We bring out the best** in others. Our conversations should be so full of encouragement, truth, love, and grace - that others should feel more seen, more valued, and more whole, simply by our presence in their lives.

Our lives should look different simply because we walk everyday with Jesus, we listen to His words, and we live the life He intends for us to live.

QUESTIONS

Who in your life brings out the best in you? What is it about them that encourages you and challenges you towards change and growth?

Remember... salt heals. Take a moment and think through your relationships (those at home, work, extended family, neighborhood, friendships, etc.) Are there any relationships in your life that need healing? Why?

What is one step you could take today to either bring healing to a relationship or strengthen it?

WEEK 2: Day 2

On day one of this week, Jesus compares us to salt. Today Jesus has another metaphor: light. While salt is a precious resource, light is vital for life. Nothing can survive on our planet without access to light. Jesus' followers would be very familiar with the theme of light.

> *The Lord is my light and my salvation.* ~ Psalm 27:1

Jesus would even say later in his ministry:

> ***I am the light of the world.*** *Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.* ~ John 8:12

It is God who brings light and life to each one of us. He brings hope in the dark and life to all who follow Him. So when Jesus calls us "light" in the Sermon on the Mount, He is calling us to reflect HIS light to the world around us. As the moon reflects the light of the sun, so we reflect the light of Jesus to the world around us.

Jesus tells us:

> *You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.* ~ Matthew 5:14-16

When we see the word "You" in verse 14, we tend to think of ourselves individually. However, in Greek (the language the Bible was originally written in) this "You" is plural, meaning that our light shines best in community. We are light together.

Think of Christmas lights. One light doesn't make for a beautifully decorated house at Christmas. You need multiple lights that shine brightly and light up the dark winter sky. That's what Jesus is calling His followers to do.

Also, Jesus says, "You are the light." Notice this is not saying that one day in the distant future, if you clean up your life, you will be light. No, He is saying you are the light TODAY and what you do today makes a world of difference. When you are a follower of Jesus, you immediately have opportunities to bring light and life to the world around us.

QUESTIONS

Think of a moment that "We" the church brought light into our world. Maybe it was through an act of making a difference in our community, giving generously, or serving those at our church. How were/are you part of the bigger group bringing light?

One of the ways we bring light is to graciously and kindly talk about our faith in Jesus. Think of a time you, or a group you were part of, brought light to someone in your world. It might be through an invitation to a church service or small group, a conversation about faith or God, or even giving someone a book. What happened?

Who in your life needs the light of Jesus? Make a list of 5 people you care about whose lives would be better with Jesus. Spend the next 5 minutes praying for each one.

WEEK 2: Day 3

There is an incredible children's Bible out there called the *Jesus Storybook Bible*. (We highly recommend it!) It is a great resource for both kids and adults because it shows us how every story points to Jesus and how His love is written on every page. This message is needed today more than ever. Most people view the Bible as an impossible set of rules that we must try our best to obey if we want God to love us. That was also a belief back in the time of Jesus. Jesus chooses to dispel that belief.

> *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.* ~ Matthew 5:17-18

The key word to understanding this passage is the word FULFILL. Think of running a marathon. Most of us couldn't wake up tomorrow morning and run a marathon, we would fall short; we would probably never finish. This word "fulfill" paints the picture of someone stepping up to the starting line to take our place. Someone runs the marathon on our behalf.

So, while there are Godly rules found in the Law and the Prophets, (think of the Old Testament in our Bible), Jesus says He came to fulfill the standard made by these rules on our behalf. Jesus isn't changing who God is or changing the word of God. Jesus goes out of His way to honor every word and every letter of the Bible. He has come to fulfill any rules in the Bible on behalf of us. He wants us to start in the right place - not with the rules but with love. Following any rules always follows love.

QUESTIONS

Think of someone you let down in the past (i.e. you broke a promise to, lied to, cheated on or someone you disappointed) who forgave you. What happened and what was it like to experience this forgiveness?

One of the central beliefs of Scripture is that we all fall short of the standard of God. Have you had an experience of realizing you fall short and asked Jesus to forgive you and step in on your behalf? What was that experience like?

Jesus, highlights the importance of every word in the entire Bible. Do you have a favorite Bible verse? What is it and why?

WEEK 2: Day 4

Think of the best teacher you've ever had: that one teacher in elementary or high school or even college that sticks out to you. What sets them apart? Most likely, it wasn't just the way they taught math or science or art, but it probably had more to do with the way they treated you. What left an impression was most likely the way they believed in you, invested in you outside of the classroom, or the way they encouraged you and helped along the way. Teachers have the potential to do a lot of good in our lives, but also a lot of harm.

While many of us aren't teachers, professionally, we all have people in our lives who look up to us and take their cues from us. Maybe you coach a little league team, manage people at work, volunteer at church, or maybe you are part of a PTA or an HOA. All of us are teachers and leaders in some way, shape, or form. In light of that, Jesus gives us a strong warning in this next section.

> *Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.* ~ Matthew 5:17-20

Jesus tells us to be careful what we teach and model to others. For example, in His day, the religious leaders were the Pharisees and teachers of the law. While both of these groups were experts on the Bible (most would have the entire Old Testament committed to memory), the way they lived and taught actually pushed people further away from God. They were self-righteous, thereby teaching their followers to do the same. They were also judgmental of others who they deemed less spiritual and they taught others (intentionally and sometimes unintentionally) to do the same. Today is a warning (think a check engine light on your car) to reflect on what you are modeling about faith to those in your life.

QUESTIONS

Who in your life has best modeled walking with Jesus? What kind of impact have they had on you?

Who are people in your life that you might be the best example of Jesus to? What are you doing to regularly encourage them to follow Jesus (could be directly or indirectly)?

Take a moment and review the last week: Are there any moments you need to go back and apologize to someone for because your actions didn't reflect the words and life of Jesus?

UNCOMMON

WEEK 3

WEEK 3

WEEK 3

WEEK 3: Day 1

In Matthew 5:21-26, Jesus gets right to the point. He begins a series of examples that demonstrate how doing the right thing is only the beginning. Jesus calls us to go further and really look at the source of our actions, both good and bad, so that we can develop an inner character and heart that aligns with the Kingdom of Heaven. Today, we will focus just on Matthew 5:21-22.

> *You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.* ~ Matthew 5:21-22

Jesus is equating anger and name-calling with murder. It seems extreme at first, but He's trying to get our attention to point to something deeper. It's not about knowing what level of anger, contempt or violence is acceptable so we can simply follow the rules. It's about how much we value someone else's existence.

Murder is the ultimate way to say someone's life doesn't matter but anger, contempt, and name-calling are also ways we communicate that someone's life is worth less than ours.

"Raca" means "worthless" and the phrase "You fool" carries the feeling that "God doesn't even want you."

When we let anger and contempt live comfortably in our hearts, we are in dangerous territory because any step towards devaluing another human is a step too far.

For Jesus, this is about right relationships and treating each other as valuable children of God.

QUESTIONS

What emotions or situations most often trigger anger or contempt in you? How do you usually respond in those moments, both externally or internally?

Jesus connects anger and name-calling to devaluing a person's worth. Can you think of a time when you were on the receiving end of contempt or dismissive language? How did it affect your sense of worth?

Why do you think Jesus makes such a strong connection between internal emotions and external actions like murder? What does that teach us about how seriously God takes the heart?

What would it look like to cultivate a heart that values others the way God does, even in conflict? Is there someone in your life right now you need to see differently?

WEEK 3: Day 2

Jesus doesn't just show us the seriousness of murder, anger, contempt, or hatred. Instead, He follows it with a powerful word: "Therefore"

This word shifts us from what not to do, toward what love actually looks like in action. Because human souls matter deeply to God, Jesus invites us to consider how we should treat one another.

He gives two examples:

> *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.* ~ Matthew 5:23–24

> *Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.* ~ Matthew 5:25–26

Bringing a gift to the altar was all about staying right with God. Jesus says reconciliation with others is just as essential.

Love in the Kingdom of Heaven is never just vertical; it's always with God and with others.

Even in the second example, where it's not a brother or sister but an adversary, Jesus tells us to take the first step. Don't delay. Do what you can.

As Paul writes:

> *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* ~ Romans 12:17-18

As far as it depends on you: live at peace. Be intentional. Be proactive. Don't wait to repair what's broken.

QUESTIONS

Is there someone in your life right now that you need to be reconciled with? What would it look like to take the first step? What keeps you from pursuing peace or initiating hard conversations? Fear? Pride? Exhaustion? What might Jesus want to say to you about that?

Jesus emphasizes immediate reconciliation. Why do you think reconciliation matters so much to Him?

How does Jesus' teaching here reshape your view of what spiritual maturity looks like? How do right relationships fit into your relationship with God?

"As far as it depends on you..." What's one step you can take this week to live that out? Is it a conversation, an apology, a prayer, a change in attitude?

WEEK 3: Day 3

A life of faith is not just a private relationship between you and God. Faith is lived out in the ways you see, think about, and interact with others too.

Jesus is still using the Ten Commandments as a launching point, showing that just following the rules externally is not enough. We can "obey" in shallow, performative ways. But Jesus is calling us to wholeness – to real holiness.

Jesus invites us to examine not just our actions, but our inner life – our thoughts, emotions, imaginations. Because that's the soil from which everything grows.

If you've begun to pull contempt and unrestrained anger out of your life, you've made real progress toward living in the Kingdom of Heaven. But Jesus doesn't stop there. He presses on.

> *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* ~ Matthew 5:27–28

This isn't about noticing someone is attractive. Jesus is confronting the way we objectify, use, or dehumanize others in our hearts. Every person we see is a child of God – a precious, complicated, and vulnerable miracle.

Lust, in this context, isn't love, respect, or appreciation. It's the desire to objectify, use, own, or control someone for your own satisfaction.

That's why Jesus speaks so drastically:
If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. ~ Matthew 5:29-30

As the Bible Project puts it:
"Jesus was the master of hyperbole. This imagery is his way of communicating that the real problem is in our hearts, not in our eyes or hands. But he's making clear that the stakes for this type of behavior are high."

Jesus grew up with the Hebrew Scriptures, which present sex as a beautiful and sacred gift (see Genesis 2:19–25, Song of Songs). But when sexual desire causes us to dishonor the image of God in ourselves or in others, or causes relational damage, it's not just breaking rules, it's breaking people. Jesus calls us to do whatever it takes to stop that kind of harm.

QUESTIONS

What helps you keep your mind in a healthy place when it comes to sexuality or relationships?

When do you notice yourself most tempted to objectify or disconnect from people's humanity?

What's one boundary or habit that has helped keep you from going down a destructive path? Is there something you would like to start doing this week?

Why do you think Jesus takes this topic so seriously?

WEEK 3: Day 4

Our two verses today have been interpreted in ways that have done a lot of damage. As you read them, come with an open mind to see the point Jesus might be trying to make. There is a context here that our modern brains need.

> *It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.* ~ Matthew 5:31-32

As we've seen all week, Jesus is concerned with the entire well-being of every human and there has been a progression. If we are addressing our anger, contempt, belittling, and objectifying of each other and if we are loving and valuing each other as precious children of God, we will do what it takes to treat each other well.

In another conversation Jesus says:

> *Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.* ~ Matthew 19:8

To the men Jesus is speaking to, they had the power to continue or end their marriages. It was a big debate of the day: did the Old Testament make it clear that men can leave their wives for any reason or was it only after adultery?

Jesus is saying to pause and stop this theoretical debate. The only reason you can debate this is because your hearts are hard. Do you not understand how deep a marriage union is? Do you not understand how precious the woman is that you are married to? How can you even talk about cutting her out of your life and leaving her with nothing but degrading, dangerous choices?

If divorce is something you can casually debate, you've missed the point.

As Tim Keller says: "Jesus Christ says if you understand marriage as this deep unity, this deep oneness, then you will discover that divorce cannot be like taking off your clothes; divorce is more like taking off your arm."

God's intention from the beginning was for men and women to live as partners. Marriage should never include abuse or neglect. In our current day, men and women both have the power to choose and we all have the responsibility that comes with that power.

Divorce is never to be taken lightly. But if divorce is the only option, even it should be done in love.

> *Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.* ~ Romans 12:10

QUESTIONS

When you hear the word "divorce," what feelings or experiences come up for you?

If we are addressing our anger, contempt, belittling, and objectifying of each other and if we are loving and valuing each other as children of God, how would that change our relationships and marriages?

Dallas Willard says "divorce, if it happens, should be done as an act of love." What do you think that means in real life?

Romans 12:10 says "Honor one another above yourselves." What would "honoring" your spouse or significant other look like practically in your life?

UNCOMMON

WEEK 4

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WEEK 4: Day 1

"I swear on my dear mother's life..."

"Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye..."

There's an endless amount of things we can find ourselves swearing by to raise the stakes of our promises. But, Jesus, of course, enters into this element of human interaction just as he did with the ones before. He references the accepted rules and then digs them up to look at the roots – to get to the heart of the matter. He's helping us actually love God and love others. He says:

> *Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.* ~ Matthew 5:33-37

Swearing an oath on God or something else seems like a good way to make a promise sound powerful. But Jesus says that when we simply tell the truth, we don't need to swear on anything at all. Our words, if true, are strong enough.

Jesus also knew that people make oaths for more reasons than we let on. Sometimes we make oaths to impress someone with our sincerity. Sometimes we push a little harder to get our way. It can be a way to manipulate someone and override their free will and judgment.

Honoring the needs of others to make their decisions without coercion is part of living in the rightness of the Kingdom of Heaven. So, Jesus says, do not bring God into your power struggles. Speak clear and true.

QUESTIONS

When have you heard (or said) something like "I swear on..." to prove a point? What's the difference between simply telling the truth, and trying to sound convincing?

Jesus says our "yes" and "no" should be enough. How easy or hard is that for you? Are there areas of life where you struggle to follow through on what you say?

Have you ever been pressured by someone else's strong words, promises, or manipulation? How did that affect your ability to make your own choice?

What would it look like for your words to be more trustworthy in everyday life?

WEEK 4: Day 2

Have you ever had someone try to bring God into the situation in a way that just seemed a little weird or pushy? Maybe they were using the Lord's name in vain.

> *You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.* ~ Exodus 20:7

What does it mean to take the Lord's name in vain? It's not just about whether it's ok to say "Oh. My. God." It's much more than that. "Vain" carries the feeling of falsehood, worthlessness and emptiness. It's about speaking, thinking, and using God's name in a way that removes the truth and power of God's very real presence and being.

Examples of using the Lord's name in vain:

Saying "I swear to God" to make a lie sound believable or push your agenda. Saying yes or no should be enough without dragging God's name in for weight.

Saying things like: "God told me you need to do this…" or "God wants you to give me…" is using God's name to manipulate or control others. Instead we could say "I sense God prompting me - what do you think?" or "Here's where I feel led and I'm open to feedback."

If you claim the name of Jesus but live with hate, dishonesty, pride, or cruelty, you are living in a way that dishonors the name you claim. This is what Jesus is helping us understand.

QUESTIONS

Have you ever heard someone use “God told me…” in a way that felt manipulative or uncomfortable? How did that make you feel?

Why do you think people sometimes feel the need to add “God” to make a point stronger or more convincing? What’s the danger in that?

This devotional talks about living in a way that honors the name you claim. In your everyday life (work, home, friendships), where do you feel challenged to live out the name of Jesus more fully?

Instead of “God said,” what are some healthy ways to talk about what you’re sensing spiritually – without sounding like you’re speaking for God?

WEEK 4: Day 3

"Readers are advised to remember that the devil is a liar. Not everything that Screwtape says should be assumed to be true even from his own angle. There is wishful thinking in Hell as well as on Earth." – CS Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

The Screwtape Letters is C.S. Lewis's darkly funny take on spiritual warfare, written as a series of letters from Screwtape, a senior demon, to his bumbling nephew, Wormwood. Their mission? Ruin one human soul using classic evil tools: half-truths, flattery, distraction, and emotionally – charged church drama. Screwtape teaches that the best lies aren't bold – they're almost true. Manipulation is the name of the game, and if they can get the human to lie to himself first, the rest is easy. It's like a demon TED Talk on gaslighting, pride, and why vague spirituality is more useful than outright sin.

In Matthew 5:37 Jesus reminds us of the simple, but sobering idea that:

> *All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.* ~ Matthew 5:37

Anything else beyond this comes from the evil one. All of those tools (manipulation, flattery, gaslighting, etc.) are in direct opposition to the way God asks us to approach each other: with deep honesty, love, and respect for each other's free will.

In Genesis 3, the first distortion of reality appears and we are never the same. The serpent introduces the first lie – not by denying God outright, but by twisting His words.

He asks: "Did God really say…?" He reframes the truth in a way that plants doubt, confusion, and distrust in Eve's heart. The serpent doesn't force Eve – he manipulates. This moment is the origin of human deception, self-justification, and rebellion.

"The serpent is portrayed as a creature who uses words to deceive and distort reality. This is the beginning of lies in the biblical story."
– The Bible Project

QUESTIONS

In The Screwtape Letters, the demons use flattery, distraction, and half-truths. Which of those tools do you think is most dangerous in your own life?

Genesis 3 starts with "Did God really say...?" How does that same kind of subtle doubt show up in your thoughts today?

Have you ever lied to yourself to justify something? What helped you eventually recognize it?

What's one area of your life where you want to be more honest - with God, with others, or with yourself? What would it look like to take a step toward that this week?

WEEK 4: Day 4

> ***"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much."*** ~ **Luke 16:10**

The small moments matter. Our words, thoughts, feelings…even though they may feel insignificant, are the places to begin practicing being trustworthy and honest. Through first acknowledging their power, taking them seriously, and starting to notice what is honestly bubbling up in us, we can begin to change into a person who loves living in the ways of Jesus.

We don't become honest people in dramatic public moments. We become honest in the quiet, ordinary ones.

As Dallas Willard wrote, *"The most important thing in your life is not what you do; it's who you become."*

Spiritual transformation isn't about behavior management. It's about becoming the kind of person who naturally tells the truth without manipulation or deceit because their heart has been reshaped by Jesus.

So we start where we are, with what we think, what we say, and what we choose when no one's watching. These small things form us and they form the way we love, lead, and live.

> *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.* ~ Ephesians 4:25

QUESTIONS

What's one "small" area of your life (thoughts, words, habits) where honesty is easy to overlook? Why do you think those small moments matter?

Dallas Willard says, "The most important thing in your life is not what you do; it's who you become." What do you think about that?

Luke 16:10 says that faithfulness with little leads to faithfulness with much. Can you think of a time when being trustworthy in a small thing led to a bigger impact?

What's one small, honest habit you could start this week to move toward becoming someone who lives in the way of Jesus? (e.g. owning mistakes, avoiding swearing by anything, checking motives before speaking, etc.)

UNCOMMON

WEEK 5

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WEEK 5 NOTES

UNCOMMON

WEEK 5: Day 1

Revenge is big business in our day. Around 40% of movies and TV shows use revenge as a primary plot line. Movie franchises such as Kill Bill, John Wick, and TV shows such as Revenge, and the Punisher, focus almost exclusively on the idea of getting revenge when someone is wronged.

Revenge connects so deeply with each one of us. All of us have been wronged, and when we are many turn to revenge.

And the deeper the hurt, the stronger the desire for revenge. Before Jesus, God gave his people a code of justice. It's found in the Old Testament (before Jesus) and it's best summarized by these words:

> *Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury.*
> ~ Leviticus 24:19-20

The idea here is NOT to give people a license to get revenge, but instead to promote justice. There should be a limit to the justice that can be inflicted on someone who wrongs you. If someone steals a loaf of bread, burning their house down is too strong of a punishment. Throughout the Old Testament, God sets boundaries and limits to promote justice. Jesus calls us to an uncommon life.

> *You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.* ~ Matthew 5:38-42

Here Jesus gives real life examples of things that could happen to a person in their day. A Roman soldier could force someone to carry their belongings for a mile, but Jesus says, "go with them two miles". A slap to the face was seen as a public insult, and instead of retaliating Jesus says turn the other cheek. The idea of meeting injustice with mercy sounds impossible to us, yet that is exactly the life Jesus modeled for us.

QUESTIONS

Think of a time someone really wronged you (it could be emotionally, physically, or financially). Take a minute and write out in detail what happened and the specific feelings you experienced.

What would it look like in that situation to "turn the other cheek"?

How do you navigate offering grace and forgiveness but also having healthy boundaries in your relationships?

WEEK 5: Day 2

Yesterday we looked at how Jesus calls us to respond to those who harm us. We saw how Jesus asks us to respond with grace and generosity. This can only occur from a heart that is deeply rooted in Jesus, so that we can bring our hurt and pain to God.

While it can seem spiritual to stuff our anger and hurt deep inside, the Bible gives us a better way. We can begin by praying to God about our anger and hurt.

Rich Villodas says it this way: "If you never pray about your anger, it bottles up inside and becomes dangerous. Jesus can handle, even invites, your honest prayers."

We see countless examples of this in the Bible. One example is from King David, who prays:

> *My God, whom I praise, do not remain silent, for people who are wicked and deceitful have opened their mouths against me; they have spoken against me with lying tongues. With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause. In return for my friendship they accuse me...* ~ Psalm 109:1-4

We see very real and raw emotions from David. He has had people lie about him, slander him, has been betrayed by a close friend, and he takes this pain directly to God:

> *Help me, Lord my God; save me according to your unfailing love. Let them know that it is your hand, that you, Lord, have done it. While they curse, may you bless; may those who attack me be put to shame, but may your servant rejoice. May my accusers be clothed with disgrace and wrapped in shame as in a cloak.* ~ Psalm 109:26-29

He asks God to help, to bring justice to those who have hurt and betrayed him. Now, notice that David doesn't say that he is going to let these people back into his life so that they can hurt him again. He does say, "God I'm going to trust you for justice in this situation, I'm not going to lash out and do to others what they have done to me." Often this is the first step towards forgiveness and refusing to repay hurt for hurt.

QUESTIONS

Have you ever prayed a prayer like the one from David? If so, when, and do you remember what you prayed? Write out some of it below.

Think of a current hurt you are experiencing. Take a minute to write out in your rawest emotions what happened and what you want to ask of God. Don't hold back, God can handle it.

How do you feel after praying? Describe the emotions you've experienced below.

WEEK 5: Day 3

The last couple of days we have looked at how to respond when someone hurts you. Although we may consider the word "enemy" a strong word to describe someone, an enemy is someone who has hurt us or someone that is difficult to love.

For example: An enemy could be a co-worker who is constantly undermining or trying to take credit for another person's work. An enemy could be a relative who votes differently or says disparaging things about beliefs we hold. Enemies are people or groups of people who can either hurt us or be seen as a threat to the things we hold dear. They are the people we speak about when we say, "How could someone do that?" or "I'd never say/do what they did."

The tendency in our society is to distance ourselves from our enemies or attack them. But like always, Jesus has a better way:

> *You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor" and hate your "enemy." But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*
> ~ Matthew 5:43-48

How do we move towards loving people like this?

Jesus tells us that our enemies matter to God. He sends good things their way (rain, sun, and countless other things) because they matter to Him.

We are called to an uncommon life. Just because people might avoid or speak poorly of us, doesn't mean we retaliate. We are different, because Jesus has called us to an uncommon life.

Take small steps. Yesterday, we looked at praying about our hurts and pain, but today, we can actually pray for God's blessing on those who are difficult for us. Also, in verse 47, Jesus says to begin by going out of your way to greet. This word "greet" communicates an open-handed invitation. We don't distance ourselves, but we move toward relationships with those who are different.

QUESTIONS

Have you ever prayed for someone who is difficult for you? Pick one person you know who fits the definition of an enemy. Commit to praying for good things to happen to them for the next 7 days. Below, write out a prayer.

Have you ever had someone in your life that was difficult to love and over time you better understood them and it became easier? If appropriate, write your experience below.

Do you have one person, or maybe a small group, that could encourage you and provide wisdom in the situation above? Ask them to help you create healthy boundaries while also moving towards love.

WEEK 5: Day 4

Yesterday we looked at the striking words of Jesus that said we must love our enemies. Jesus gives us a clear definition of love:

> *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* ~ John 13:34

Our starting point is always to remember that God is love. He has chosen to love us in spite of the many things we've done that we aren't proud of or wouldn't want to talk to others about. God loves us and He asks us to love in that same way. Today, we look at two components of love.

> **Love tells us the truth:** *Speak the truth in love.* ~ Ephesians 4:15

Speaking the truth means we don't minimize the pain we've experienced. We don't excuse someone for their actions. We speak the truth, and we do it with love. That means we choose to NOT air our grievances on social media or publically. It means we authentically communicate what was done by the person who has wronged us, we engage in a conversation (when safe and appropriate) and we seek to move toward truth and healing.

> **Love forgives:** *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* ~ Colossians 3:13

Now to be clear, this doesn't mean we allow a dangerous person free access to hurt us repeatedly. To forgive means to choose to stop holding a wrong against someone. This is often a process that takes time. We may need to forgive this person every time we remember or relive the wrong. In forgiving, we choose to no longer hold onto our anger, we choose to no longer process it outside of appropriate places. Perhaps a counselor or a trusted friend can support you through this. Then, we move on.

**One note on this: These steps are for relationships of people with relatively equal levels of power and influence. These steps and verses do not apply to cases of abuse, misuse of people in authority, or any other type of uneven power dynamic. In situations like this, it's important to go immediately to trusted friends or people in authority.*

QUESTIONS

Take a minute and write out some things you've done where you have needed God or others to forgive you. Why is it important to start with understanding how Jesus forgives us when it comes to this conversation?

Think of someone who has wronged or hurt you recently. Have you spoken the truth in love and forgiven them? If not, what steps can you take today?

If the person isn't interested in reconciling with you, or if that isn't possible or appropriate, how can you begin the process of forgiving them today?

UNCOMMON

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WEEK 6 NOTES

UNCOMMON

Jesus now addresses something that can pull us away from right living in the Kingdom of Heaven - the desire to have the approval of others, especially for being "good."

Basically, Jesus says "Play to an audience of one." If you are doing good things in order to impress other people or to get people's attention, God will honor your desire and get out of the way. The audience you desire is the one you will get.

The word "hypocrite" has a slightly different meaning in the original Greek. Jesus used this word seventeen times and He was talking about the Greek actors who put on plays for audiences. He says, in your real life, don't be like an actor on a stage where you pretend before an audience. Do not do the thing in order to be seen. Live for God alone. He knows when He is wanted and when He is actually not.

Jesus gives some examples in Matthew of things people were performing, including good deeds, prayer, and fasting.

> *Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* ~ Matthew 6:1-4

> *And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.* ~ Matthew 6:5-8

> *When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* ~ Matthew 6:16-18

QUESTIONS

When you do something good, how much does other people's approval matter to you? Why do you think that is?

What's an example of a time you were tempted to "perform" your faith instead of simply living it?

How can you tell if you're doing something for God or for recognition from others?

What does it look like in your life to "play to an audience of one"?

WEEK 6: Day 2

Yesterday we talked about living for an audience of one and being careful to not perform our lives for other people's attention. Today, let's talk about making a habit of living for God. Jesus wasn't giving us a new set of rules on never letting anyone see us living out our faith. He was reminding us to check our intentions. The Sermon on the Mount is not about a set of laws, it's about real life and choosing to live in an uncommon way as we walk everyday with Jesus.

How do we ever learn to live in a way where our left hand might not know what our right hand is doing? ...Through habits and discipline.

You've brushed your teeth, tied your shoes, started your car...thousands of times. You can do them without thinking. When you practice something enough times, it becomes so natural that you do not even really notice what you are doing. Jesus is saying, practice living your faith: being generous, praying, giving up comfort to be with God... so often that it becomes natural to live in right relationship with God and others.

Jesus gives some examples in Matthew of things people were performing, including good deeds, prayer, and fasting.

> *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* ~ Colossians 3:17

> *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.* ~ Deuteronomy 6:7

Dallas Willard says, "Jesus does not call us to do what he did, but to be as he was, permeated with love. Then the doing of what he did and said becomes the natural expression of who we are in him."

QUESTIONS

What's one habit in your life right now that's so natural you don't even think about it? How could that principle apply to your faith?

Jesus talks about practicing generosity, prayer, and love until they become second nature. Which of those comes most naturally to you? Which takes more intentional effort?

When you think about living for God in all you do (Colossians 3:17), what's one ordinary part of your day you could invite Him into more?

Deuteronomy 6 talks about impressing God's commands on our hearts and our families. What are some practical ways you can weave faith into daily conversations and routines?

WEEK 6: Day 3

The Lord's Prayer is part of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus gives an example of how to pray. Praying regularly will help you develop stronger faith, deeper understanding, and a more authentic relationship with God. Jesus says…

> *This, then, is how you should pray: 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.* ~ Matthew 6:9-13

The first part is about addressing and loving God.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name… God can be spoken directly to, with love and with honor.

…your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven… God's will, not ours. This is the uncommon life we are learning to live in the Sermon.

The second part is about how to handle the challenges of life.

Give us today our daily bread… Please provide for us and help us go to you as our source for today.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors… Help us practice forgiveness. We release the right to get even. We trust God.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one… Life is full of choices, help us make good ones. Help us partner with You.

QUESTIONS

Which part of the Lord's Prayer do you connect with most right now, and why?

Why is it important that the prayer begins with honoring and loving God before asking for things?

"Give us today our daily bread" is about relying on God for today. What's one area where you need to trust Him daily instead of worrying about tomorrow?

"Lead us not into temptation" is a reminder to partner with God in our choices. What's one step you can take to better choose what leads to life?

WEEK 6: Day 4

Forgiveness is talked about twice in this little section of the Sermon. Like many of the extreme examples Jesus uses, it can sound harsh at first.

> *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors… For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*
> ~ Matthew 6:12, 14-15

Even as we learn how to pray and be with God, Jesus is reminding His listeners that our relationship with God is not some separate and disembodied thing. How we are with each other is closely tied to how we are with God. Our great mission is to love God and love others as ourselves. Forgiveness is fundamental to a life with God. God doesn't expect us to easily forgive someone who greatly wronged us. God does want to see us start to orient our lives around love and true healing, freedom and right relationships.

Tie this to Matthew 18 where Jesus says the Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who cancels the debt of a servant who owes him more than could ever be repaid.

> "No actual king would forgive such a massive debt or even allow his servant to become so indebted in the first place. Jesus paints this exaggerated picture for rhetorical effect—to spark our imagination about how it would feel to be freed from the crushing weight of such an unpayable debt." – Bible Project

Jesus is going to extremes to remind us that we have been forgiven, and our role is to do the hard work of learning to pass that forward… even when it hurts. Because Jesus also knows it is good for our own health to forgive. As the famous saying goes: "Resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die."

QUESTIONS

How does Jesus' strong language in Matthew 6:14–15 make you feel? Does it challenge, confuse, or motivate you? Why?

Why do you think Jesus links our forgiveness from God with our willingness to forgive others?

What's the difference between saying "I forgive you" and truly releasing the debt?

Have you ever experienced healing or freedom after forgiving someone, even when it was hard? What helped you get there?

UNCOMMON

WEEK 7

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WEEK 7: Day 1

Have you ever felt stress around money? If your answer is Yes, the good news is… you're not alone. According to some current studies, right around 65% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck (a key indicator of feeling stress and anxiety around money) and the generations that feel the most financial stress are Millennials (age 28-45) and Gen Z (18-28). But regardless of age or stage of life, stress around money for many of us is a constant. Financial pressure affects our sleep, our productivity, and even our relationships. Around 30% of divorces in America are caused by financial disagreements and stress. It shouldn't surprise us that Jesus chooses to talk about money a lot. He uses this next portion of the Sermon to give one of his most famous teachings around money:

> *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.* ***For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*** ~ Matthew 6:19-21

The idea here is on our focus and attention. What is it that I'm pursuing in my life? Often, we begin with good intentions like wanting to provide for our family, wanting to make it on our own, wanting to use our job and influence for good, etc. However, over time what happens is the focus changes to accumulating more money and the things money can buy. Money has a way of promising lots of things to us: safety, security, power, influence, joy, and happiness. Yet as we will learn, money can be a bad master. So Jesus, in the verses above, asks us to pause and reflect. "Where is my heart today? What matters most to me?" If we are courageous enough, the best way to know what matters most is to look at what we spend our money on. Because where my treasure and resources are, there my heart is also.

QUESTIONS

Have you ever bought something you were really excited about and then regretted it? (examples: car, time share, boat, etc.). Describe what happened.

Jesus says, where your treasure is, your heart follows. List 5 things you really enjoy spending money on (eating out, the person you are dating, clothes, etc.) and why.

We have to be careful to avoid shame when it comes to how we use our money. As you look at your list above, what does spending money on those things provide for you? (joy, experiences with friends or family, etc.)

WEEK 7: Day 2

Yesterday we talked about the influence money has in our lives. Jesus goes on to say:

> *The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.* ~ Matthew 6:22-24

Jesus calls us to make a decision: Who will we serve? While it's easy to say "God", the question becomes, do my actions back up my belief in God? So today, let's unpack two practices that help us remove the power and influence of money in our lives.

Practice 1: Simplicity

> "There are two ways to get enough: one is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less.
> —G. K. Chesterton"

We can choose to live on less and find great joy in it. For example, you could choose to go a year before buying any new clothes and find that you experience more joy in consuming less. We can make it a practice to wait seven days before any non-essential purchase and find the thing we wanted was only a passing desire. Practices like these, and many others, help reduce the pull of money in our lives.

Practice 2: Sacrifice

> *Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops.* ~ Proverbs 3:9

We choose to put God first, and we do this by giving first to God. These are called our "first fruits" in the Bible. Giving to God the first 10% is considered a tithe. At first this feels impossible so you may choose to start small. You may choose to cancel a couple of streaming services and give that money back to God or it might mean being intentional about spending and practicing simplicity in order to give first to God. We do this in order to break the hold of money in our lives.

QUESTIONS

Do you know anyone who is obsessed with money? How can you tell? How has this impacted the things that matter most to them?

Think of a time you used some of your money to make a difference in someone's life. What did you do? And what made you give?

Which of the two practices (Simplicity or Sacrifice) do you need to put some intentionality towards? Why? What is the first step you can take today?

WEEK 7: Day 3

Anxiety. We all feel it. We've all experienced that feeling of being overwhelmed: the sleepless nights, the racing thoughts and irritability. We've all been there. In fact, today anxiety is on the rise!

Recent studies have found about 70 percent of us have had our lives negatively impacted by anxiety. In addition, almost 1 in 3 people are considered habitually anxious. Anxiety is something they deal with everyday. The good news is, Jesus speaks directly to us about worry and anxiety:

> *Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 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? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?* ~ Matthew 6:25-27

It's not wrong to feel anxious. Life is hard. But Jesus gives hope.

Today we are going to start by naming the things that we worry about. Jesus names a few, but his list isn't exhaustive. Many of us worry about money, our relationships, how others view us, our health, our jobs, our families. We worry about the unpredictability of tomorrow and even global events. Worry and anxiety are everywhere, and yet, no matter how hard we try, we simply cannot stop worrying. We can't force ourselves to stop dwelling on all the things outside of our control (this is why it's so infuriating when someone says, "Don't worry about it" or "Trust God"). These statements are trite and not helpful. We see Jesus in verse 26 remind us of the incredible value God places on each one of us. That if God cares enough about the birds of the air to provide for them, won't God then provide for us? This is great news for us. We cannot simply "stop worrying" by effort, the only way to reduce worry and anxiety is by handing it over to the One who provides...God.

QUESTIONS

Over the past week, what are three specific things you've worried about?

What did you do with each worry? Did you distract yourself, call a friend, journal, go for a run, or something else? Did your practices help? Why or why not?

Think of a time God provided for you in an unexpected way in the past. What was the situation? What happened when God provided?

WEEK 7: Day 4

Once we begin to remember who God is, and the value and care He has for each one of us, we can see how little our worry actually changes the outcome of our lives.

> *And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.* ~ Matthew 6:28-34

Worry rarely helps us and yet many of us fall victim to it. It consumes our thoughts and keeps us up at night. All of the "what if" and "what shall we do" questions consume us! It's here that Jesus calls us to look to Him and His kingdom. Throughout scripture God reminds us the best way to deal with anxiety is to remember God's provision, but then to also lean in on God's people.

> *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.* ~ Galatians 6:2

This might mean talking with your small group, seeing a Christian counselor, or talking with a pastor. None of these are a magic bullet for our worry, but they are a starting point for us to reinforce in our mind that God provides and His people are here for us.

QUESTIONS

Pick one worry you are facing in this season (children, your spouse, a world issue, etc.) In the space below write out your exact worry, and why it's so prevalent in your mind.

Who have you talked with about your worry? How did that conversation go?

What is one step you need to take today?

UNCOMMON

WEEK 8

WEEK 8

WEEK 8

WEEK 8

WEEK 8

WEEK 8

WEEK 8

WEEK 8

WEEK 8 NOTES

UNCOMMON

WEEK 8: Day 1

The Sermon on the Mount teaches us what it is to live in the Kingdom of Heaven and in right relationship with God and each other. We strive to live a life of strength, purpose and meaning.

As we reach the end of the Sermon, Jesus gives a warning about trying to control each other as we learn and grow. Have you ever had someone overexplaining or correcting you on something because they think they are an expert? Maybe you've even had a time when someone told you all about something you actually ARE an expert in.

Legend has it that a young male scientist once tried to explain the principles of radioactivity to Marie Curie, who literally ***discovered*** radioactivity and won two Nobel Prizes for her work.

Jesus is reminding us, as you learn and grow, allow God to be the judge and the expert and the one who is responsible for everyone's spiritual growth. We can help each other, but don't let it become control.

> *Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.* ~ Matthew 7:1-6

Wisdom comes from God, so continue to go to Him and ask Him for what you need. Allow others to grow at their own pace. Continue the good work in your own life and allow God to give direction. The Bible says:

> *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.* ~ Matthew 7:7-12

QUESTIONS

When have you experienced someone "overexplaining" or "correcting" you on something you already knew well? How did it feel at that moment?

Jesus warns us not to judge each other but to first "take the plank out of our own eye." What does that look like in real life? Why do you think we often notice others' flaws before our own?

How can we help each other grow in faith without crossing the line into control or judgment?

Jesus tells us to "ask, seek, and knock" for what we need. In your own faith, what is something you are asking God to give you help or wisdom in?

The "Golden Rule"

> *So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.* ~ Matthew 7:12

It does not mean that if you like your coffee black, you should bring black coffee to your best friend (who actually loves their coffee with creamer and sugar). Doing to others what you would have them do to you, is a lot like the other topics in the Sermon. It's about the heart and intent behind our actions. You would love someone to bring you coffee, so you bring it for a friend, not your order, but theirs.

It's about realizing that what we want is deeper than surface "sameness". We want love in the way we can understand…doing the work to look deeper and care for each other on that level.

The Sermon is not the only place you'll find these instructions. They fill the New Testament as well. This is the way of Jesus.

> *Do to others as you would have them do to you.* ~ Luke 6:31

> *The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*
> ~ Romans 13:9-10

> *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: Love your neighbor as yourself.* ~ Galatians 5:14

> *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*
> ~ James 1:5

QUESTIONS

When have you experienced someone caring for you in a way that went beyond what you asked for and met your deeper need instead?

If someone only knew you by how you treat others, what would they learn about your values?

How does the Golden Rule challenge you when dealing with people you don't naturally get along with?

Think about your daily interactions at work, home, or in your community. Where is it hardest for you to slow down and see what someone else really needs?

What are you asking God to help you have wisdom in right now?

WEEK 8: Day 3

As we were on day one, we are back at the choice we all face. Just as we started with the end in mind, here we are, ready to make a choice. Will we live by this Sermon? Just hearing Jesus' Sermon won't help us. The difference-maker in life, according to Jesus, is putting His words into practice. And that is our goal in this study, to take the words of Jesus and put them into practice in our lives today.

It is always about following God's will. Living this uncommon way of life…it will bear fruit. We will have integrity and strength if we practice it. It won't be easy, but it will be right.

> *Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.* ~ Matthew 7:13-14

True and False Prophets

> *Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.* ~ Matthew 7:15-20

True and False Disciples

> *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'* ~ Matthew 7:21-23

Now, we ignore the loud voices, we get quiet, and we listen for God's voice. Will we choose to follow the One who loves all of us?

QUESTIONS

Jesus says the road to life is narrow. What do you think makes the narrow road so hard to choose or stay on?

"By their fruit you will recognize them." What kind of "fruit" (attitudes, actions, outcomes) helps you recognize someone living in the way of Jesus? How do you check the fruit in your own life?

Jesus warns about people who say "Lord, Lord" but don't actually do God's will. Why do you think it's possible to do religious activities without truly knowing Him?

> *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*
> ~ James 1:22-25

We've walked with Jesus through every line of His Sermon on the Mount. We've heard His call to live differently. We are called to love our enemies, forgive freely, speak truth, seek God first, and trust Him fully. We've seen that His way isn't a list of rules but a vision for life in the Kingdom of Heaven, here and now.

Now Jesus leaves us with a choice. Not whether we admire His teaching. Not whether we agree with it. The choice is whether we will live it.

> *Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.*
> *~ Matthew 7:24*

The storms will come. The floods will rise. When they do, your life will rest on the foundation you've built… one choice, one act of obedience, one surrender at a time.

The uncommon way is narrow, but it is good. It leads to life. It bears fruit that lasts.

The Sermon on the Mount doesn't end when we close our Bible. It's meant to keep going, in your workplace, your home, your friendships, and your quiet moments. Every "yes" to Jesus is another stone set into the foundation.

So, as we finish this study, the real question is not, *"What have you learned?"* but *"What will you do?"*

QUESTIONS

The wise builder puts Jesus' words into practice. What's one specific teaching from the Sermon on the Mount you want to actively practice this week?

The crowds were amazed because Jesus taught with authority. In what ways has His teaching through this Sermon surprised, challenged, or inspired you?

How has The Sermon on the Mount changed you and made you want to live an uncommon life, walking everyday with Jesus?

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