



Theme: The Sermon on the Mount

“Living for Gold... God!”

Weekly Memory Verse: ¹⁻² **“Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging.”** –Matthew 7:1-2 (The Message)

Family Activity for the Week: The antidote for our tendency to judge others is not really non-judgement but choosing to love. This week, discover verses on love in Scripture and find Bible stories about God’s love. Share God’s love with one another and your community through your word and actions. Remember growing love doesn’t have to be practiced in big, fancy ways. Find small, yet meaningful ways to share God’s love with others. When we are open to God growing us through the Holy Spirit, everyday acts will help produce love! Pray daily, asking God to grow love in your heart and lives!

Monday, May 17 – Read Matthew 7:1-6. Judging is a necessary part of life. Yet Jesus said, “Don’t judge.” This did not mean we should not have opinions or that we should not evaluate people’s actions carefully, especially if they are harmful. It does mean that we should hold our opinions with humility and remember that we too have fallen short of how God calls us to live. Humility requires us to admit we often don’t know the entire story. Ultimately God, not us, is the all-knowing judge and justice is finally God’s responsibility. (Still verse 6 made it clear that Jesus did not call anyone to be naïve or accept abusive actions.)

- A wise man had to testify in court. In answer to the question, “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?” the man humbly replied, “Your honor, I don’t know the whole truth.” Sometimes that uncomfortable reality is at least part of Jesus’ hyperbolic “log” in your eye. What is a current tense situation that might find a better resolution if you could open yourself to look at it from a different point of view?
- Differences, not what you have in common with a mate, friends or family members, usually cause conflict. If you’ve fallen into what many counselors call “negative focus” (seeing only flaws and ignoring real strengths), what steps can you take to restore relationship health? In the same way we are not to judge others harshly, we are to remove ourselves from relationships in which we are judged harshly. Are there any situations in which you need to remove yourself from someone else’s harsh judgment?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep me healthily aware of my strengths while still being able to, “take the log out of my eye,” before trying to correct or “improve” others. Amen.

Tuesday, May 18 – Read Matthew 7:7-12. Matthew, and Luke 6:31, said Jesus taught his followers, “the Golden Rule:” “You should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you.” Some

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Hebrew, Greek and Roman thinkers wrote negative forms of that idea, such as, “Don’t do to others what you don’t want them to do to you”. Jesus’ positive statement, scholar William Barclay said, took a wider view. “The attitude which says, ‘I must do no harm to people’ is quite different from the attitude which says, ‘I must do my best to help people.’”

- When Jesus compared God favorably to human parents, he reminded us that we may see, “good things,” differently than God does. Have you ever seen a child who strongly wants something, such as a fourth ice cream cone, that the child’s father knows would not be good for the child? How does this shape (or reshape) your understanding of Jesus’ promise that God will give “good things to those who ask him”?
- At times, Christians seem to think the Golden Rule only means we are to, “be nice,” in surface-y, social ways. Jesus said his short phrase held the deep spiritual essence of the entire body of, “the Law and the Prophets,” all the Hebrew Scriptures. What people or conditions make it hardest for you to truly treat others as you wish they’d treat you? When has someone else treated you by the Golden Rule’s standard? How did that affect you?

Prayer: *Lord, in your earthly life you never imposed yourself on others, yet always tried to win even your enemies. Give me wisdom to know how to honestly live out your Golden Rule. Amen.*

Wednesday, May 19 – Read Matthew 7:13-14. It can feel risky trying to live by Jesus’ principles. They run counter to so much, “conventional wisdom,” and often it can be hard to know precisely how to apply those principles to specific situations. Jesus reminds us that we must not let fear stop us from making that choice. To live is to risk. If we always choose the risk-free, completely safe, and convenient path in life, we can find the failure we experience is the failure to truly live.

- Jesus never gave in to the urge to promise an easy road. He said, “Go in through the narrow gate,” and “the gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it.” Jesus’ path, though not always the most comfortable, is always best in the long run. When have you had to choose between one way that was easy but wrong, and another that was difficult but right? What did you decide?
- Some people draw the mistaken conclusion that Jesus’ words about a “difficult road” mean that following him produces a dismal, joyless life. The apostle Paul, in prison after a lifetime traveling the Mediterranean world to preach Jesus, wrote in Philippians 4:4-7, “Be glad in the Lord always!” and said he (and all Christ followers) could have, “the peace of God that exceeds all understanding”. How has choosing the “narrow gate” added freedom and meaning to your life?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, set me free to more and more live in your kingdom. Transform me until I want what you want and fix my eyes daily on you. Amen.*

Thursday, May 20 – Read Matthew 7:15-19. Jesus echoed and expanded John the Baptist’s preaching. In Matthew 3:7-8, John challenged his hearers, notably the Jerusalem religious leaders, “Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon? Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives.” Jesus said we judge a fruit tree’s health not by its looks, but by the fruit it bears. The key spiritual reality for all of us is not how pious we look publicly, but whether our lives reflect the principles of God’s kingdom.

- We often focus on these verses mainly when we hear another story about a religious leader who has fallen short, whether sexually, financially or in some other area of integrity. But Jesus’ principle works the other way too. Are there people you have learned to trust more as you have seen the fruit of their life and work? What kind of “fruit” do you find most valuable and nourishing?
- It may seem like a fairy tale image for a wolf to dress like a sheep. Scholar William Barclay said Jesus may have thought of Old Testament prophets: “[A shepherd’s] garment was a sheepskin, worn with

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the skin outside and the fleece inside... That sheepskin mantle had become the uniform of the prophets (2 Kings 1:8) ... sometimes that garb was worn by those who had no right to wear it. Zechariah in his picture of the great days to come says, 'He will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive' (Zechariah 13:4)." How can you assess if a would-be "shepherd's" teaching and character align with Jesus?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, in your day there were people who claimed great holiness yet hated and crucified you. Let your Spirit guide me to discern who I should listen to as I seek to follow you. Amen.*

Friday, May 21 – Read Matthew 7:21-23. Yesterday we read Jesus' warning that there can be people who look outwardly religious yet bear "bad fruit." In today's reading, he upped the ante! He pictured people on the Judgment Day talking about prophesying in his name, expelling demons in his name, doing lots of miracles in his name—and yet hearing the tragic words, "I've never known you."

- Clearly there was (and is) a deeper dimension to doing, "the will of my Father who is in heaven," than just putting on a good religious show. It's not even enough to name Jesus as Lord, or perform extraordinary activities, like throwing out demons or working miracles in his name. What matters is that one put into practice in one's life the true righteousness of which Jesus had spoken in Matthew 5:20. How would you define the difference between showy outward "righteousness" and an inner as well as outer life that puts "true righteousness" into practice?
- Scholar N. T. Wright said Christians today can still look on the outside rather than the inside: "Within the Christian church there is always a temptation to ask different questions about people. 'Is he one of us?' people enquire. 'Does she belong to my party, to our group, to the proper tradition?' But parties, groups and traditions have a way of attracting both genuine believers and true prophets on the one hand and false prophets and hangers-on on the other." How can you look beyond labels and seek the deep inward reality of faithful service to Jesus?

Prayer: *King Jesus, the focus of your ministry was not making people say "Wow!" but drawing them into the Kingdom of God. Teach me how to live a life with that same focus. Amen.*

Saturday, May 22 – Read Matthew 7:24-27. Those in older generations may recall the pop song, "Yesterday, When I was Young." Younger readers can ask their parents or grandparents about it. It included these somber lines: "The thousand dreams I dreamed, the splendid things I planned, I always built, alas, on weak and shifting sand." Jesus' sermon ends with the image of two builders who built houses during the dry season, when the wadis of Palestine, like arroyos here in the American Southwest, looked safe and harmless. When "the rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house," the house built on sand washed away. Jesus called us to be wise, building our life on the eternal, enduring values of his kingdom.

- It's a fact: it will rain in your life sooner or later. Conditions right now are like a driving rain for many people. What are you doing daily to build a character and depth of relationships that can weather life's storms? What people or forces shaped your life's foundation, your assumptions and values? Jesus, who taught "with authority" (Matthew 7:29), made his teaching the greatest revelation of how we can know God. Abot de Rabbi Nathan said, "Some other Jewish teachers told a similar parable, with a major difference: In their story, the foundational rock in their parables was the Torah, God's law. Here Jesus' teaching holds the same role as God's message in the traditional parable." How can you make Jesus' teaching central to your understanding of God's call on you? Consider writing, and putting where you see it regularly, a personal statement of the principal purpose for which you believe God is calling you to live.

Prayer: *King Jesus, I want you to rule in my heart, in my life. Reshape my values and beliefs until they truly form a firm foundation for living a life that honors you. Amen.*

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