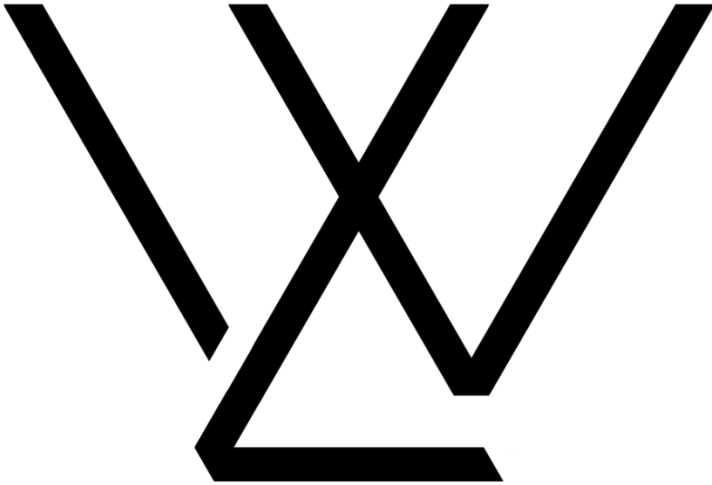




WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 6-10





Word to Life studies are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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— **WEEK 6** —

- SEP. 02
- SEP. 03
- SEP. 04
- SEP. 05
- SEP. 06

— **WEEK 7** —

- SEP. 09
- SEP. 10
- SEP. 11
- SEP. 12
- SEP. 13

— **WEEK 8** —

- SEP. 16
- SEP. 17
- SEP. 18
- SEP. 19
- SEP. 20

— **WEEK 9** —

- SEP. 23
- SEP. 24
- SEP. 25
- SEP. 26
- SEP. 27

— **WEEK 10** —

- SEP. 30
- OCT. 01
- OCT. 02
- OCT. 03
- OCT. 04

Week 6: Matthew 5:38-42

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 6:38-42

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity**: Read the passage and write down some notes before moving to the questions below.

- **Activity and Question**: Read Leviticus 24:17-23. Would you describe Jesus' words in Matthew 5:38-42 as contradicting what was taught in Leviticus? Why or why not?

- **Question**: Jesus encouraged His hearers to "*turn the other cheek.*" What do you think that means and how would you apply that today?

- **Question**: How would you summarize this passage in your own words?

- **Question:** Would you describe yourself as more likely to be inappropriately passive or inappropriately aggressive?

- **Question:** When Jesus says, *“Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you...”* Do you think that means you should never refuse someone who asks you for something?

- **Activity:** Read the passages below that deal with financial matters. After you’ve done so, think about how Scripture’s larger context would inform Jesus’ teaching in vv. 38-42.
 - Proverbs 22:7

 - Proverbs 22:26-27

 - Psalm 37:21

 - Exodus 22:14

 - Romans 13:7

 - Matthew 5:40-42

Week 6: Matthew 5:38-42

Day 2: Cheeks and Hearts

READ: Matthew 5:38-42; Romans 12:2,18,19

EXPLORE:

In Matthew 5-7, Jesus did not give His disciples a new law to follow. Rather, He gave them examples of how their lives should look different. *“If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles”* is not a new regulation to keep meticulously. Consider the cultural context: Roman soldiers were allowed to force Jews to carry a load for one mile, after which the Jew would be released from his obligation. Imagine if, after being forced to carry a load one mile, you kindly said to the cruel soldier, *“May I assist you by going another mile, as an overflow of the love God has shown me?”* What an example of how to show love to the unloving!

Likewise, when Jesus said, *“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also,”* His concern was not our cheeks, but our hearts. What did it mean to be slapped on the right cheek? Most people are right-handed, so if you’re facing each other in hand-to-hand combat, it would be awkward and ineffective for their right fist to make contact with your right cheek. If they want to harm you, their right fist would hit the left side of your face. If a right-handed person slaps you on the right cheek, it must be a back-handed insult, not a painful injury. It’s your ego that gets wounded and your temper that becomes inflamed. So, in this verse, Jesus did not prohibit self-defense in the case of attempted injury or murder, but He did prohibit retaliation in the case of personal insult. If someone insults you, gossips about you, or tries to get a rise out of you, turn the other cheek.

Naturally, our hearts want revenge. Our natural disposition is to escalate the conflict. We need to confess those sinful desires to God. Jesus never sought revenge. In spite of everything His enemies did, He prayed, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*¹ Our sinful desires for revenge have been nailed to the cross with Christ. Since He has risen, we too can have new hearts and lives. We don’t

¹ See Luke 23:34 for reference.

need to return to our old vengeful ways. The Holy Spirit can empower us to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile, especially for those who despise us.

Romans 12 tells Christians to “*not be conformed to the world*” but also to “*if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*” We cannot seek peace by conforming to the world’s sinful ways. Even when obligated to humbly use force in self-defense, we must never do so in a spirit of vengeance. That prerogative rightly belongs to God only.

While Jesus’ primary concern in Matthew 5 is with our hearts, there are important steps to take if you are suffering from abuse. You may be tempted to keep silent from a sense of shame and fear, but please speak honestly with a church leader about what you’re going through. Your leader can prayerfully guide you through your complex situation. Please also call the police, who are authorized to promote your physical safety by actively restraining the wrongdoer.² May God’s word be your primary source of guidance as you seek safety, comfort, and healing.

BIG IDEA: Self-defense is legitimate, but revenge is sinful.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Do you have any vengeful thoughts, words, or deeds to repent of? Confess them to God and believe that Jesus has fully paid for them.

- **Meditate on Luke 23:34.** Ask the Holy Spirit to transform your heart. Instead of imagining revenge, ask God to forgive your enemies.

² See Romans 13:1-4 for reference.

Week 6: Matthew 5:38-42

Day 3: *Lex Talionis* – The Law of Retribution

READ: Matthew 5:38-5:39

EXPLORE:

Today we will explore the idea of *lex talionis* which is Latin for the law of retribution. Jesus evokes this idea when he says, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth.’”*

This is an idea that was common in systems of law of the time that was seeking to control excessive vengeance by making retributive payment exactly fit the crime. In Levitical law it can be seen in Leviticus 24:19-20, *“If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.”* This was likely established by making punishment part of a legal system and curbing the effect of vigilante retribution by the individual. The first example of this type of retribution in the bible can be seen in Genesis 4:23-24, *“Lamech said to his wives: Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold.”* The concept of an eye for an eye is an improvement over the escalatory vengeance described in Genesis 4, however even the concept of the law of retribution does not rise to the level of a Christian ideal.

In Mathew 5:39 Jesus says, *“But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil.”* On its surface this is a shocking statement that seems to reject the principal of justice, however in context after the discussion of the law of retaliation Jesus is speaking of rejecting personal vengeance, not legal rights. Christians should renounce the right to confront a hostile person with violence, and instead

rely on God for justice. With the larger concept not to confront evil with violence, but evil with good. It is important to note that the examples listed by Jesus in the rest of the passage were not criminal offenses at the time but were seen as slights to a person's honor. Turning the other cheek when slapped, was not only refusing to retaliate but to put oneself in a degrading and vulnerable position. This highlights that we should not seek to retaliate to save face but take our value from following God's will and trusting in his Justice. Instead of seeking justice over all perceived wrongs, kingdom citizens are called to place their trust wholly in God and expect little from our fallen world.

BIG IDEA: God designed His law to limit vengeance and unjust retribution. Jesus reflected God's heart in the Law.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Pride and our concept of honor can drive us to seek retribution for perceived slights. How can we work in our daily life to place our trust in God and turn the other Cheek? Are there any examples in your own life?

- **Question:** Have you ever seen someone uphold this standard? Denying personal justice can often be a powerful example of faith to a world that expects people to seek vengeance.

Week 6: Matthew 5:38-42

Day 4: Give to the One Who Begg

READ: Matthew 5:38-42

EXPLORE:

Jesus' words are shocking. There is no other way to characterize it. We are on our fourth day of studying this text and you ought not be surprised if they continue to leave you challenged and maybe even a bit unsettled. In particular, today's study is going to focus in upon Jesus' stunning encouragement to "*Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.*"³

At first glance, it seems as though Jesus makes it virtually impossible to pass by someone who is in need. It appears as though the Christian who desires to conform his or her life to Jesus' teaching could never refuse a request. It is not quite so simple, however. Let's take a look.

First, Jesus' teaching is not prescribing an absolutized non-negotiable requirement governing every interaction between a person of means and one who is in need. We must remember that Jesus is describing the sort of behavior that ought to be present in the life of the Christian. In short, Jesus is making a radical call for believers to be more generous than what the letter of the law would require. His followers should be characterized by both avoiding sinful retaliation and also by being profoundly generous toward those in need.

Second, Jesus is commanding Christians to demonstrate a wise and often uncomfortable level of generosity toward others. On a number of occasions, the Scriptures speak about the value of

³ See Matthew 5:42 for reference.

one's work corresponding with their own personal provision.⁴ Additionally, the Proverbs give a general warning about the dangers of debt.⁵ Debt makes the borrower a slave to the lender. It is not always or essentially virtuous to lend money to someone any more than it is always or essentially virtuous to refuse. Remember, Jesus was aware of the dangers of lending and debt when He said these words, so we should ask, "What exactly is He encouraging us to do in verse 42?" The larger teaching of Scripture puts it into perspective. Namely, Jesus is describing how His Church ought to be characterized by and known for abundant and selfless generosity toward those in need.

Third, Christ-like generosity does not shrink back from *truly* helping people who are *truly* in need. There are a few ways that this principle plays out. When we create a budget so as to honor the Lord with our finances, we ought to allocate funds to caring for those who are truly in need. When God crosses our paths with someone who is truly in need, we ought to purposefully, prayerfully, and often sacrificially consider how the love of Christ would compel us to care for them. When we see needs which exist particularly within the Church, we ought to rally to see those needs met in a way that matches our identity as the body of Christ working together.⁶

BIG IDEA: Radical generosity that is wise and often sacrificial ought to characterize Christians.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you find it more challenging with saying "yes" to those who express need or saying "no?"

⁴ See II Thessalonians 3:9-11 for reference.

⁵ See Proverbs 22:7 for reference.

⁶ See Acts 2:41-47 and I Corinthians 12:21-28 for examples of this concept playing out.

Week 6: Matthew 5:38-42

Day 5: The Law of Retaliation Leveled Up

READ TOGETHER: Exodus 21:24, Proverbs 24:29, Romans 12:19

***Instructions:** We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

I think we have all experienced being hit by a child at some point in our life. The child lacks self-control, is ignorant, and perhaps even thinks it is funny to hit someone else. This is not surprising to us. However, if an adult hit the child back, we would be in shock. It would be unnatural and it is a slight offense that the older, more mature person should simply bear. Now, imagine if it wasn't a child, but an adult who strikes us. How many of us would react with the same patience and self-restraint as if we were hit by a child? I (Sabino) believe this is what Jesus is getting at though as he expounds on the law of retaliation.

The law of retaliation was specifically to be exercised by the civil magistrate. If someone strikes you and you lose a tooth, the civil magistrate is to remove the tooth of the one who struck you. Remember, Jesus is saying that our righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. The Scribes and Pharisees were probably all too eager to enact a tit for tat judicial system. Jesus shows us a better way.

If there is a violation of our body, possessions, or liberty (*walk one mile*) we should not immediately demand for the civil magistrate

to be involved. We should bear and endure the injury without retaliation or vengeance.

Now, this does not mean that Christians should always avoid the authorities, but our motivations ought to be for the public good and not simply our recompense.

A great example of this is found in 1 Samuel 25. Nabal had returned the good that David had done him for evil. David became angry and at first sought to take vengeance into his own hands. He gathered 400 of his men and pledged to not leave one male alive in the whole family of Nabal. David was going to add one sin on top of another. Thankfully, Abigail wisely intervened and David refrained from killing Nabal and his heirs. This teaches us the same lesson Jesus is trying to teach us here. It is better to exercise self-restraint than it is to retaliate.

BIG IDEA: Justice is good, but mercy is better

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** How does obedience to this teaching reduce conflict and war?

- **Activity:** Make a list of some other some other passages that also demonstrate this teaching by Jesus.

Week 7: Matthew 5:43-48

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 5:43-48

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity**: As you are reading this week's Bible passage, write down some notes below about what you notice.

- **Question**: The specific command to "*hate your enemy*" is not present in the Old Testament. In your opinion, why were people saying to "*hate their enemies*" in Jesus' day if it wasn't in the Hebrew Scriptures?

- **Question**: Why do you think that the idea of "*loving your enemy*" is connected to the idea of being called "*sons of your Father?*" What does it mean?

- **Question:** How would you explain vv. 46-48 in your own words?

- **Activity:** Read Leviticus 19:9-18 is the first time in Scripture that we read the phrase “love your neighbor.” What are some specific examples in Leviticus 19 for how you can love your neighbor?

- **Question:** How does the reality that God sends rain and sunshine on the just and the unjust help your ability to love your neighbor and your enemy well?

Week 7: Matthew 5:43-48

Day 2: Why You Should Love Your Enemies

READ: Matthew 5:43-48

EXPLORE:

Before my wife and I (Stephen and Shelby) moved to Texas, we both had the privilege of coaching varsity sports. Sports were both important and formative for us and we were excited to influence young people through competitive athletics. One consistent theme that we both learned to communicate to our respective teams was about representing their school well when they traveled. We wanted to remind them that their actions gave the opposition an idea of what their school was like.

In Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus was challenging His followers with the idea that the way they treated their enemies powerfully communicated something about God's character. In Romans 5:10 the Apostle Paul reminds us, *"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."* It follows that when Christians love their enemies, they are being graciously empowered to reflect the heart of God who has first mercifully loved them in Christ.⁷

Notice the example Jesus cited in verse 45. Jesus said, *"For He [God] makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."* Jesus was not unclear. God's constant graciousness and patience toward us ought to result in a gospel-saturated ability to love one's enemies. Ephesians 4:32 reads, *"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."* As Christians, we ought to love our enemies because we have first and foremost experienced a love beyond comparison in Christ.

⁷ See Psalm 103:10 for reference.

We ought to be able to love those who are our enemies because our hearts have been so richly satisfied by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that we can be prayerfully free from retaliation, sinful anger, pride, greed, and more. The struggle to love one's enemies is a reminder of our continual need to have our deepest affection, and our very identity established in the completed work of Christ and the ongoing work of sanctification it has secured. Every time you are enabled by God's grace to love your enemy in a Christ-like way, you are given an opportunity to continually anchor your life in God.

Moreover, Jesus instructed His followers not just to *love their enemies, but to pray for their persecutors*.⁸ I've wondered how often we've focused on the directive to love our enemies that we have unbiblically forgotten to pray for them. We ought to pray that our enemies would come to repent and believe the Gospel. We ought to pray for forgiveness, grace, justice, and more. Certainly, Jesus embodied this perfectly when, on the cross, He prayed that those who were actively persecuting Him would experience forgiveness from God the Father. Jesus did not pray empty or vague prayers for their earthly health, wealth, and prosperity of His enemies. Rather, in word and in deed, Jesus loved His enemies well and prayed for those who persecuted Him.⁹

BIG IDEA: Christian love for enemies reflects God's heart.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Ask God to help you love and pray for your enemies. Share with your LifeGroup.

⁸ See Matthew 5:44 for reference.

⁹ See Luke 23:34 for reference.

Week 7: Matthew 5:43-48

Day 3: A Most Difficult Command

READ: Matthew 5:43-48 and Leviticus 19:9-18

EXPLORE:

We miss a great deal when we detach the teachings of Jesus from the context of the Hebrew Scriptures He would have read, memorized, and loved. Your instructed reading today in Leviticus 19 was not an accident. In many ways, it helps to ground a biblical sense of what Jesus had in mind when he instructed those who would live as citizens of the heavenly kingdom to love their enemies. Let's do a little bit of background study.

In Leviticus 19, God commanded His people through the Law to love their neighbors. Several examples of how to love them are given. A godly love of one's neighbor according to the law included making sure the poor and the sojourner could eat from your field. A godly love of one's neighbor according to the law included not lying to them, not lying about them, not cheating them, not stealing from them, not harboring a grudge and not taking vengeance against them. In no uncertain terms, Leviticus laid out what it looks like to love your neighbor.

Loving your neighbor did not mean condoning sinful behavior and it does not mean that today either. On the contrary, a godly love of one's neighbor involved a fair and ethical treatment of them as a persevering act of obedience supremely in light of what God has commanded. In Matthew 5, we see Jesus certainly pulling from that framework established in the law codes of Leviticus 19 and others as He instructs His followers to love not just neighbors, but also enemies.

He said, *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your*

*enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”*¹⁰ Unfortunately, some teachers in the time of Jesus had added an opposite misapplication of God’s Law that included a hatred of their enemy. In a sense, as long as they loved their neighbor, they thought they were free to hate their enemy.

In the context of Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus does not specify whether he is talking about personal hostility or political enemies. Even as we ask this question, however, we should be careful to not neglect what Jesus was instructed His followers to do. To “love” in the New Testament is an attitude and it is an action which seeks the good of the other. This is the same undercurrent which would lead those who are persecuted to pray for their persecutor. The example of Stephen in Acts 7:60 was used throughout church history to encourage those who were being persecuted for their faith to be obedient to the way of Christ. We ought to remember that without a God-given supernatural empowerment, a Christ-like love for one’s enemies would be impossible.

BIG IDEA: The instructions in Leviticus help us to understand what it might look like to love and pray for our enemies well.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Read Acts 7 and remind yourself of the example of Stephen. What do you notice about what he did in some of his final moments?

¹⁰ See Matthew 5:43-44 for reference.

Week 7: Matthew 5:43-48

Day 4: The Impartial and Content Love

READ: Matthew 5:43-48, Romans 3:9-18

EXPLORE:

As we continue into the Sermon the Mount, we are presented with a call to love. It is a love that does not stop at the ones we care about and respect, but it extends to the ones that revile and persecute us. This is undoubtedly a difficult thing to practice, because of our sinful nature. It is easy to repay kindness with kindness, and to repay unjustness with unjustness. However, we should be like our Lord in everything, especially in our love.

God has set a perfect example in this as Jesus illustrates, *“For He [God] makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”* God is not partial to whom He loves and neither should we. Jesus attacks our partiality by saying those who love only those who love them are like tax collectors and Gentiles. We, as Christians, should be set apart from the world, so we can show the glory of God through our actions. God lets the sunshine and the rain fall on all people because He loves without partiality, and He calls us to love as He does.

We could not go further without mentioning that none are considered “good” on their own in God’s eyes. In our modern-day society, we often separate the good from the evil. However, we are all morally wrong in God’s sight without Jesus. Paul writes in Romans 3, *“None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”* When we understand that no one is truly a good person, God’s mercy becomes all the clearer. We should love our enemies, because we were once like them in the sight of God. Without Jesus, we are enemies to God and yet He loved us perfectly. While we cannot control the sun and rain, we can certainly strive to love others regardless of how they treat us.

An interesting connection lies in the final verse of chapter five. Jesus calls us to be perfect, just as God is perfect. This certainly seems an impossible task considering that no one is even good, much less flawless. Most English translations say perfect, but the expanded translation of “*wanting nothing necessary to completeness*” sheds some light on the meaning. Jesus is saying that we should be like God not only in our love, but in our wanting and yearning. We cannot be “perfect” in the sense of faultlessness or excellence, but we can be perfect in our contentment with God. Fulfilling the Lord’s commands and His will gives us contentment and peace. Loving our enemies, however difficult, is a part of what allows to reach that contentment that God has. It does not lie in worldly pleasures and wealth, but in living our lives for God, and loving the people around us, regardless of their love to us.

BIG IDEA: We should love our enemies as to imitate God, and, in doing so, learn to be perfectly content with God and His mercy.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How should our attitude change towards our enemies knowing that apart from Christ we are all evil in God’s eyes?
- **Question:** Does the different translation of “perfect” change our goals for our faith? Why or why not?

Week 7: Matthew 5:43-48

Day 5: Doing More than Others

READ TOGETHER: Exodus 23:4-5, Deuteronomy 23:7, Philippians 3:12-14

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, a leader of the English Reformation, had the reputation that the way to make him a friend was to mistreat him. What an amazing reputation! The wrong deed brought the enemy to Cranmer's attention, and if you had his attention, you could be sure you would receive good from him and not evil. I think we can tell that this was a man who lived by faith and pursued righteousness.

The command to love your neighbor is readily seen in the second half of the Ten Commandments. What cannot be seen in the commandments of God is the command to hate your enemies, but over time the teachers of Israel had developed this teaching. We have to be aware how this still happens today. We have the Scriptures and we are a religious people, but teachers of the Bible can begin teaching things that are contrary to God's word and it can develop into the standard teaching of the church. Jesus corrects this "development" of teaching and makes explicit the command to love our enemies.

Sons are naturally to have the likeness of their Father. Our Father's likeness is one of benevolence. He loves His enemies by making the sun rise on them and by sending rain to them. He does good even to those who curse Him. Therefore, we must speak well to those who curse us. We must do good to those who do us evil. We must pray for those who persecute us. This requires going against our natural instincts. Grace must conquer the root of bitterness and revenge in our hearts. It is much easier to do what we see done all the time. Each morning we wake up, we can consider how our Father in heaven makes his sun rise on the evil.

Jesus basically says loving our neighbors is the bare minimum. As children of God, He desires much more of us than the bare minimum. The world loves their neighbor. What sets us apart? May it also be said of us that whoever comes into our orbit, whether friend or foes, receives the love of God from us.

BIG IDEA: Love of our enemies exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Activity:** Write out a list of ways of why this command is so challenging to obey.

- **Activity:** Start praying for those whom you consider to be your enemy. Pray with these Scriptures in mind and share what happens in your heart when you pray this way.

Week 8: Matthew 6:1-4

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 6:1-4

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity**: As you are reading this week's Bible passage, take notes on what you observe below.

- **Question**: Have you ever been tempted to "*practice your righteousness before other people?*"

- **Questions**: What do you think is the difference between what Jesus warns against in Matthew 6:1 and what He commands in Matthew 5:16?

- **Question**: The opening verse of Matthew 6 is an outline for the chapter. What are the specific areas of superficial righteousness that Jesus warns about throughout Matthew 6?

- **Question:** Do you think that v. 2 teaches we should work to actively conceal our good works so that they are not seen and praised by others? Why or why not?

- **Question:** What do you think Jesus means by “reward” when He says of the hypocrites, “*They have received their reward...*”?

- **Question:** How would you apply vv. 3-4 when you actively serve and give?

- **Question:** On more than one occasion, “reward” is mentioned in these verses. In your opinion, is Jesus teaching that we should serve with a reward in mind? Why or why not?

Week 8: Matthew 6:1-4

Day 2: A Matter of the Heart

READ: Matthew 6:1-4 and Matthew 5:16

EXPLORE:

In Matthew 6:1-4 Jesus starts with a warning, raising a matter of the heart issue introducing the concept that we can do good things for the wrong reasons. At the time it was common to see religious leaders do their giving or praying in public to be recognized. In these verses Jesus indicates that the proper position of the heart should be to glorify God with our deeds, not seeking recognition or praise for our actions. To do so will mean that the "Earthly" reward or the praise of men will be your reward and there will be no "Heavenly" reward.

Today, this may look more commonly like sharing through a social media post and should cause us to consider our motives in such activities. Calling attention to a need could be a very positive thing but we should consider our heart in making the post and be sure that we are acting with the proper heart.

It is interesting that these verses follow so quickly after Matthew 5:16 urging us to *"let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds..."* However, in 5:16 Jesus gave his disciples the correct motive for their deeds, that people might praise God.

This quote from C.S. Lewis summarizes it well. "Don't shine so others can see you. Shine so that through you, others can see Him."

Matthew 6:3-4 provides additional emphasis urging us in our giving to not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing so that our giving may be in secret. Obviously, this is not to be taken literally but is a way of emphasizing that self-glorification is always a present danger.

Week 8: Matthew 6:1-4

Day 3: Battling Motivations

READ: Matthew 6:1-4

EXPLORE:

Everything we do is for a reward. Everything we do has a motive to gain something. The question is: "What are we hoping to gain?" Are we hoping to gain an earthly, physical reward or a spiritual gain and maturity? Daniel is a great example of someone acting based on a desire to receive a spiritual blessing rather than an earthly one. Daniel 6:10 says, *"When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously."* Daniel had no intention of making his good works seen by others, but they were observed nevertheless unto the glory of God. The problem is not with others seeing our good works, after all Matthew 5:16 says, *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven,"* the problem is when our motivations are for others to see our good works as opposed to doing good works out of a desire to glorify God. So, we need to constantly check ourselves and our desires to ensure that we are seeking to glorify Christ in our actions rather than self.

With that said, doing our good works in secret has value, as well. Studying, memorizing, and meditating on Scripture, praying, and fasting are all ways that we can do good works in secret that will result in spiritual blessings for us and glory unto the Lord. These actions greatly impact the actions that we do in front of others, and they protect us from sinful desires. These secret habits of grace protect our hearts from seeking the approval of others over the approval of God. The more time we spend in the presence of God, the less inclined we will be to seek after our own glory.

The other side of this challenge to do good for God and not for man, is how to compliment others when they do good works so as not to take away the glory from God. This can be difficult, but Hebrews 10:24-25 says, *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”* So, clearly, we ought to be encouraging each other in good works. Maybe the best way to go about it is to acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in that person that is evident in the good works that are being produced. After all, apart from God, we can do nothing good. We would be remiss if we did not encourage the good works we see in our fellow brothers and sisters by praising their efforts in the Lord and celebrating what the Lord is doing through them.

BIG IDEA: We ought to be engaging in secret habits of godliness in order to protect our outward acts from the corruption of seeking the approval of others over God.

Apply:

- **Question:** What motivates you to do what you do? Are your actions normally triggered by a desire for an earthly gain or a spiritual one?
- **Question:** What spiritual secret habits do you engage in alone on a daily basis? What spiritual habits do you need to improve on in order to do good works in secret that glorify God and protect your motivations?
- **Question:** How can you encourage your fellow brothers and sisters in their good works while keeping the glory on God?

Week 8: Matthew 6:1-4

Day 4: Hypocrites

READ: Matt 6:2, 23:1-7, 13, 23, 25-29

EXPLORE:

The Greek word for hypocrite is *hypokritēs*, which means an actor, stage player, or a wearer of a mask. Its origin comes from Greek theatre when an actor would play multiple characters and would change masks to depict the various people. It is someone who pretends to be someone they are not. According to Jesus, a hypocrite is a person who acts holy for their own glory instead of God's, intentionally and repeatedly. They are described as a white-washed tomb that looks good on the outside but is rotten on the inside.

Jesus uses this word 17x to describe people who wear different masks depending on the setting. This is the first time the term is used as Jesus begins to expose the inconsistency of Israel's religious leaders. It is interesting to note that our meek and mild Lord reserves His harshest language, not for the adulterers or swindlers, but for the religious hypocrites.

The motive behind hypocrisy is to impress other people; to fool others into thinking that you are better than you actually are. This can clearly be seen in our current age of social media which is bombarded with fakes, filters, and catfishing. People long for praise and attention, but the problem is our audience is wrong. We should seek applause from God in heaven and not man on earth. We should long for God's pleasure and not man's approval. The religious leaders had gotten things flipped around.

As human beings, we all struggle with hypocrisy. The Christian standard of morality is perfection, and so we should expect to fail; however, we can overcome a lifestyle of hypocrisy by caring about what is going on inside of us rather than focusing on the outward appearances that others see. It is easy to get pulled into checking off the religious boxes and forgetting our first love (Rev 2:4). Being in church is a wonderful thing, but we need to be in Christ. What are your motives for serving or giving? Whose approval or opinion do you seek? Have you ever

pretended to be someone you are not? Do you pray when you are around Christian friends, but cuss when you are around unbelievers? Do you speak about loving others and then gossip about them or ignore the needs of those around you? As Christians, we need to regularly and honestly look in the mirror and repent of any selfish motives knowing that Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us (1 Jn 1:9).

Apologetic Add-on: Hypocrisy is used as a common excuse to avoid, accuse, or leave the Christian faith. However, the argument, when broken down, is illogical. It goes something like this: church is a community built on the teachings of Jesus, but people in the church don't love each other as well as Jesus insists; therefore, the teachings are false or the community is a fraud. This logic fails if you apply it to any other setting. For example, people go to the hospital to get well, but not everyone gets well. In fact, some people even die. Does this mean we shouldn't go to the hospital when infirmed? Or, I decide to get a gym membership to get fit, however when I am at the gym, I discover that not everyone there is as fit as I want to be, in fact some are the opposite. From that, I conclude that they are all hypocrites and the gym is a sham. This illogical thinking just doesn't hold water. All humans are hypocrites, but people go to church to become what they are not. The Christian recognizes their moral and spiritual deficiencies and seeks God in response.

BIG IDEA: Live for an audience of one.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Are your actions motivated to please God or seek the attention and approval of people?

- **Challenge:** Examine areas of your life you are living in hypocrisy. Confess it to God and ask Him for the power to change.

Week 8: Matthew 6:1-4

Day 5: Practicing Righteousness Before God alone

READ TOGETHER: Psalm 112:9, Proverbs 11:24-25, Acts 9:38-43

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Stop doing good deeds! This is not the expected command to receive from our Lord. However, if our motivation is simply to be seen by men and praised by them then we ought not do that good deed. We ought to examine our hearts, redirect our motivations towards God, and then proceed on with the good work.

Jesus as the master teacher up to this point has been giving us instruction on true religion and correcting the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. But now that we know what to do, we ought to do it in the right way and for the right reasons. Jesus gives us a warning of practicing righteousness in front of other people to be seen by them. In other words, are we practicing righteousness for God's glory or for our own? If it is for our own glory, then we will receive no reward from our Father who is in heaven. We may receive a reward from man, but man can never reward like God can.

Jesus then gives us a negative example of what not to do. When you give to the needy, do not sound a trumpet so that you may be praised by others. Jesus was not speaking of a literal trumpet, but instead he meant calling for everyone's attention so that they might see your good work and praise you for your kindness. Your

reward will only be their praise and esteem, but the praise of man is fickle and fleeting.

Instead, we are to not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. This may seem impossible, but it means that we are to give to the needy in secret without calling for everyone's attention. This means we are doing it for the approval of God and the love of our neighbor only. Our hearts are pure and not mixed with vain glory. This good deed is also done in faith because we trust that our Father in heaven sees in secret and will reward us. Will we live before the face of God or only before the face of men?

BIG IDEA: Good deeds for our own praise is the sin of hypocrisy.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Why is it so tempting to practice good deeds. so others praise us?

- **Activity:** Make a list of examples in the Bible of people who practiced righteousness in secret.

- **Activity:** Read the passages below and write down what you observe about prayer.
 - Philippians 4:6-7
 - I Thessalonians 5:16-18
 - Hebrews 4:16
 - I John 5:14-15
 - Ephesians 6:17-18
 - James 5:16

- **Activity:** Read Matthew 5:7-8 and spend time each day this week praying like Jesus has instructed.

Week 9: Matthew 6:5-8

Day 2: Why pray if God already knows what you're thinking?

READ: Matthew 6:5-8

EXPLORE:

Once upon a time, I (Madeline) thought I could run a 5k with some of my runner friends. Now, I like to think I'm pretty active; I work out and I've played various sports over the years. I was planning on just walking it for the memories, but everyone else started running. The peer pressure settled in. I started to run too. But never in my life have I been more humbled. Not only was this 5k uphill, but it also felt like a full blown marathon. I immediately began to rethink all my life choices. I didn't want to give up, but I certainly was humbled.

As I did with the idea of the 5k, it is one thing to imagine you might be humbled. Again, as I realized in the midst of the 5k, it is quite another thing to be humbled and taught in reality. In prayer, we acknowledge and submit our lives unto the holy and just God who is attentive. We actively and purposefully, by the power of God's Holy Spirit, bring our limited selves before an all-powerful and all-knowing God to be changed when we pray.

God knows exactly what you are thinking, and He already knows everything you will ever need, so why do we need to pray? Why do we need to ask? How do you communicate with God who knows your thoughts better than you do? These are the questions that Matthew 6:5-8 invite us to ask.

Prayer is humbling yourself before God and saying, "I need help. I cannot do this on my own." It is also the expression of gratitude for an omnipresent and omnipotent God. He who knows exactly what we need before we even ask, desires to hear from us. This fact ought to fill us with gratitude as we remember and are reassured in our darkest of moments. If we have placed our faith

in Christ, we don't ever have to be afraid of coming to God in prayer with what is going on in our lives. He will convict, He will comfort, and He will bring clarity.

In verse 5 of today's passage, it reads, *"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."*

Prayer is not about showing others how holy you are, but rather it shows humility to give everything to the Lord. The following verse then reads, *"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."* An important distinction here is not hiding your faith, but truly focusing on time with the Lord, away from both distraction and your own selfishness.

To close, I want to draw our attention to Philippians 4:6 which reads, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* Prayer is a thoughtful and intentional act of humility and respect to our Lord and Savior, and this verse of reassurance and hope matches the heartbeat of the prayer taught in Matthew 6 for us today.

BIG IDEA: God-honoring prayer brings us into the humbling presence of God by the power of the Holy Spirit because of the completed work of Christ.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How would you answer the question, "Why do we pray if God already knows what we are thinking?"

Week 9: Matthew 6:5-8
Day 3: Committed to Pray
READ: Matthew 6:5-8

EXPLORE:

Can you imagine what it would have been like to walk the earth with Jesus by your side? Just imagine the conversations you would have, the questions you would ask, and the requests you would make known to Him. Didn't the disciples have it better than us because they could bring these things directly to Jesus. Well, Jesus's answer would be... No! In fact, Jesus said that it would be to our advantage if He left because then the Holy Spirit would come to us.¹¹ Not only do Christians now have the Holy Spirit living inside of us, but we also have access to God, just as the disciples of Jesus did.

Take a moment and slow yourself down to think about that. We can speak with Jesus today. The apostle John would write about this in his letter to the early church, writing, *"that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."*¹² Though Jesus was no longer physically with the Believers at the time of John's writing, they still had direct access to Him just as they did before- and we, too, are invited to join in this fellowship with Jesus!

Fellowship, though, is impossible without communication. This is one reason why Jesus, in this text, is inviting us to pray to our Father who sees us. Rather than praying to impress others, we are called to pray because God sees us and will reward us as we seek Him in secret.¹³

In Acts 6, the early church decided to appoint other men besides the apostles to help serve the church due to its growth. The two things, however, which were an indispensable part of ministry to the apostles were "prayer and the ministry of the word."¹⁴

¹¹ See John 16:7 for reference.

¹² See I John 1:3 for reference. Underlines added for emphasis and clarity.

¹³ See v. 6 for reference.

¹⁴ See Acts 6 for reference and context

Why was prayer such a vital part of ministry to the apostles? Didn't they have the Holy Spirit living inside of them? Weren't they sent out by Jesus Himself? After all, they were side-by-side with Jesus for 3 years! Didn't they have enough "spiritual strength" and wisdom to get the work done themselves? Apparently not.

We need to remember that it was their weakness which drove them to the Father in prayer. They recognized that they were powerless apart from Christ. They realized they could not illuminate one's heart to the Gospel, open the eyes of the spiritually blind, or cause spiritual growth (1 Corinthians 3:7). They could not do anything of eternal significance apart from Jesus (John 15:5). It was their weakness and dependency on God that drove them to Christ, asking Him to give them strength and to move in the hearts of people (2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Romans 10:1).

If prayer was such an important aspect to life and ministry to the early church, we can't help but ask the question, "what about us"? Do we go to God with our troubles, concerns, successes, and requests? Do we ask God for what we need? Do we believe Jesus when He speaks of the blessing those who pray in secret will experience?

BIG IDEA: God wants us to speak to Him and He invites us to do this in prayer. Just as the apostles were men of prayer, so also are we called to be men and women of prayer. There is a great reward from God awaiting those who pray to Him in secret.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Take a few moments to pray. Praise Him for who He is! Pour out your heart before Him. Let Him know your struggles, concerns, fears, and requests. Ask God to make you a man or woman of prayer.

Week 9: Matthew 6:5-8

Day 4: From Likes to Lattes

READ: Matthew 6:5-8, James 5:13-16

EXPLORE:

Have you ever caught yourself mid-prayer and wondered, "Why am I (Brent) even asking this? Doesn't God already know?" It feels a bit like sending a letter to someone who's already read it. In Matthew 6:8, Jesus clues us in: "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." He isn't dismissing our conversations but deepening them, shifting our focus from mere requests to meaningful engagement. The power¹⁵ of prayer lies not in the content but in the continual turning to Him—affirming our trust, dependence, and love, and accepting an invitation into something deeper.

In the first century, many flaunted their prayers like trophies on public display, not as genuine communication with God but as performances for social credit. We haven't really changed that much, have we? Today, this looks like perfectly crafted posts on social media, where we spend more time chasing followers and collecting likes than we do caring about the cause. We want our "followers" to see us as devout, strong, and faithful, even if all we truly care about is looking the part. But true prayer isn't about public displays or even private pleadings. Here's where the beautiful twist comes in: prayer is less about the outcome and more about the outpouring of our hearts.

So why then do we pray if God already knows our needs? Because prayer is transformative, not transactional. It renews our minds,¹⁶ aligns our hearts with His will, and shifts our focus from changing God's mind to allowing His heart to reshape ours. Every whispered "thank you, Lord" and every tearful midnight plea deepens our reliance on Him, carving out space in our hearts for His grace to root deeper, going far beyond the present moment and echoing into the broader story of our lives.

¹⁵ See James 5:16 for reference.

¹⁶ See Romans 12:2 for reference.

Imagine prayer not as a to-do list for God, but as a warm, unhurried talk over a freshly brewed cup of coffee with an old friend. It's not about the coffee (which He knows you'll order before you even say it), but about the shared moments, the laughs, the tears, and the silence between words. It's in these spaces we find the deepest connection. Less about informing and more about connecting. Each prayer, each shared cup, drawing us closer, building a bond of intimacy that blankets our lives with comfort and understanding. Prayer, an act of faith and trust, becomes our way of acknowledging God's sovereignty and presence, even when He already understands our needs.

So, let's not just pray to have our needs met. Let's pray to meet the need within us for a deeper, truer connection with the One who knows us best and loves us most. In this, we find the answer to "why pray?" It's here, in the stillness,¹⁷ in the space between our words and His presence. It's where we discover the true answer isn't only responding to our prayers but resting in His presence.

BIG IDEA: Prayer is not about informing God of our needs but about transforming our hearts and deepening our relationship with Him through genuine connection and trust.

APPLY:

- **Application:** This week, identify a time each day to set aside for prayer. How can you use this time to focus more on connecting with God than on asking for specific outcomes?

¹⁷ See Psalm 46:10 for reference.

Week 9: Matthew 6:5-8

Day 5: When you Pray

READ TOGETHER: Luke 18:1-14

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

The other day I (Sabino) went to the dentist to have surgery on my hips. That would be a very strange thing to hear someone say. It should be even more strange for a Christian to pray to be seen by others. We are not praying to other people nor do expect to receive an answer from them when we pray.

Hypocrites loved to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners. They stood so that they could be sure to be seen. They prayed what should have been private prayers out in public. The street corners meant in the middle of the intersection, places of high traffic, so that the most amount of people could see them. If our almsgiving should be done in private, how much more our prayer life? This does not mean we should never pray in public, but we should never pray in public to show off our spirituality. The hypocrites also heaped up many empty phrases in prayer, for they thought they would be heard for their many words. Imagine our own children droning on and on, thinking that they will receive their requests from us if they have many words. We do not give good gifts to our children because they impress with their words or flattery. We give our children good gifts because they make a sincere request and because they are our children. The Lord does likewise.

Our Lord does instruct us to go into our room and shut our door to pray in secret. We pray to Him and for Him rather than for the elevation of our own selves. Miraculously as we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, He exalts us. The key here is that we do not exalt ourselves, but we trust God to exalt us in His due timing. A man cannot exalt himself as highly as God can exalt him. We remember the names of Napoleon, Alexander the Great, and Cleopatra, but the names of Moses, David, and of course King Jesus will be remembered for all of eternity. Let God exalt you dear saint!

BIG IDEA: Prayer is unto God alone.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Activity:** Make a list of men and woman who practiced private prayer in the Scriptures.

- **Question:** What are the advantages of praying in secret rather than in public?

Week 10: Matthew 6:9-15

Day 1: Pray Then Like This . . .

READ: Matthew 6:9-15

EXPLORE:

Following His critique of improper prayer in last week's passage, Jesus now turns his attention in Matthew 6:9-15 to the pattern His disciples should use when offering genuine prayer. Jesus' command to "*pray then like this*" isn't so much a command to use the exact words presented in verses 9 through 13 (although there is no doubt much to be gained from the specific words of the Lord's Prayer), but rather, he offers a structure designed to point our hearts in the right direction, to place ourselves and our petitions in the proper context relative to God, and to ensure that we don't fall prey to the "*empty*" prayers he described in Matthew 6:5-8.

The first thing we should notice is who our prayers are to be addressed to: "*Our Father*". Prayer is not meant to be transactional. It is, first and foremost, relational. When we approach God in prayer we are embracing and living out the special relationship we have as his children, secured for us by the atoning work of Christ.¹⁸ Although cliché, it bears reminding that prayer is not our access to a cosmic genie in a bottle here to grant our wishes. Prayer is our means of living life together with a gracious heavenly father who desires to have a unique, personal relationship with each one of us.

And the structure of the Lord's Prayer itself guides us toward the proper heart posture we should have as we live out this relationship with him. Breaking down verses 9 through 13, we see that the prayer contains six different petitions. The first three focus on God's glory and are marked by the word *your* ("*your name . . . your kingdom . . . your will*"). The second three petitions then focus on provisions for our good and are marked by the word *us* ("*give us . . . forgive us . . . lead us*"). Notice how glory and praise precede requests. God's name is holy, his kingdom is good, and his will is perfect, and praying in

¹⁸ See Romans 8:15-17 and Galatians 4:4-7 for two beautiful reminders of this.

adoration of these truths is a beautiful way to start a conversation with God. Jesus goes even further though, teaching us to petition God for these things *to be* true. Not true in an absolute sense of course (after all God's name is already holy and his divine will is already all-powerful independent of our prayers), but true in the eyes of his creation, and most importantly, true in the desires of our own hearts. Jesus is teaching us, before all else, to humbly submit ourselves, our lives, and our wills to our heavenly father, fully trusting in his goodness, his reign, and his gracious plan for us in all circumstances. Of course, Jesus also demonstrated this heart posture for us, even in his darkest hour, as he repeatedly prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, "*not as I will, but as you will*".¹⁹

Recognizing our standing both as humble creatures and beloved children should encourage us all the more to bring our petitions to God. Everything we have comes from the Lord and praying for our physical needs, our "*daily bread*", is welcomed by him. But notice the word *and* that links the final three petitions in verses 11 through 13. Physical sustenance alone is insufficient. We also, and even more so, need forgiveness of sin and spiritual deliverance from temptation. These are the provisions that truly strengthen us. And these needs, that God desires for us to bring to him in prayer, are the very gifts that God promises to graciously provide.

BIG IDEA: Our Heavenly Father deserves glory above and before all else. When we pray, let us pray confidently as beloved children, praising him for who he is, seeking to reflect his will in our hearts, and knowing he will provide all that we need.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Prayer is often described in terms of adoration, confession, petition, thanksgiving, and intercession. How do you see the Lord's Prayer touching on each of these aspects? In which aspects might your own prayer life need to grow?

¹⁹ See Matthew 26:36-46 for a number of striking parallels between the Lord's Prayer and Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane.

Week 10: Matthew 6:9-15

Day 2: Remember Who You Are Talking To

READ: Matthew 6:9-15

EXPLORE:

Have you ever had a moment where you forgot who you were talking to? Maybe you talked to a teacher like a friend. Maybe you talked to a parent like a sibling. Whatever the case may be, it's likely that you've forgotten who you are talking to while you are talking to them. Now, this isn't always the biggest deal in the world, but sometimes you might use language that is not befitting of the person to whom you are speaking. Remembering who it is that you are speaking to changes how it is that you speak to them.

Our prayerful conversations with God are no different. We are supposed to remember who we are speaking to Him while we are speaking to Him. Jesus made that much clear.

In Matthew 6:9-10 Jesus taught on prayer, saying, *“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’”* Before there are requests for God to provide, forgive, lead, and deliver here in Matthew 6, there is a profound remembrance and statement of who God is. He is our Father. He is in heaven. He is holy. His holiness demands our worship and affection. He is the King. His kingdom is coming such that it impacts the earth. Each of these truths of adoration and God's glory are mentioned before there are any requests which are made.

Jesus is reminding us of who it is that we are talking to when we pray to God. There is a lot to be unpacked in only two short verses. For today's study, we will focus on two readily accessible implications for our prayer life.

First, Jesus' instructions to reference God as Father would have been a somewhat rare occurrence in the first-century Jewish mindset. Often, the title of Father was thought to be too intimate a designation for the average person to address the sovereign, creator, and governor of everything. As the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire Matthew in his Gospel Account, we will see that the sacrificial work of Christ enables us to faithfully and truthfully be embraced with the relational closeness of a Father.

Second, it is no small detail that God is described as one who is in heaven. In this, we are reminded that God is infinitely holy, glorious, and powerful. His eternal reign and power in heaven are meant to shape not only what we ask for in prayer, but how we ask for it. Moreover, the statement "*hallowed be your name*" is a reminder that the kind of prayer Jesus described is one which is aimed toward God's agenda and not our own. In a pride-soaked world where there seems to be an insatiable desire to satisfy me, myself, and I, the gloriously holy designation which God the Father holds is meant to not only precede, but also permeate our prayers. We must remember who it is that we are speaking to when we pray.

BIG IDEA: Prayer should actively remember and describe God's attributes.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How do the attributes of God in vv. 9-10 help us pray well?
- **Challenge:** Spend 15 minutes in prayer today. Work to model your time in prayer after the outline of Matthew 6:9-15.

Week 10: Matthew 6:9-15

Day 3: Lead Us Not into Temptation

READ: Matthew 6:9-15

EXPLORE:

I (Stephen) will never forget a car ride that my wife and I had with a close friend who had recently processed through tough news. Her immediate family had received a serious and challenging diagnosis. She talked to us about the sadness, grief, confusion, and concern that accompanied the doctor's initial words and the days that followed. She asked for God to miraculously move in her situation. This all made sense as she spoke. It was what she said next, however, that was surprising and incredibly profound.

She mentioned how, after they received the news, she had been able to thank God because she knew that this difficulty would result in an increased ability to trust Him and draw close to Him. God would not waste her family's trial! She knew that this difficulty would draw her and her family into closer intimacy with the Lord through the indwelling empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was instructing His followers to pray, He did not avoid the difficult trials and temptations that come our way. He addressed them head on. He taught them to pray, "*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*"²⁰ It is important to note that one word in Biblical Greek is often used to talk about both temptation and testing. The Greek word for temptation in Matthew 6:13 is also used to mean trial and testing elsewhere. It is pronounced *peirasmos*. A quick survey of the Scriptures will help unpack this concept more.

²⁰ See Matthew 6:13 for reference. Some early manuscripts include "*the evil one*" instead of just "*evil*."

We need to remember that near the very outset of His public ministry, Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.²¹ Hebrews 4:15 would remind us that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are yet without sin. Unlike us, Jesus was perfect and was not tempted by internal desires, but by external factors.²² James 1 is a helpful chapter that helps us think about how to rightly view temptation. In that chapter, we are reminded that a *peirasmos*²³ is an experience which God allows for us to be refined and challenged.²⁴ Jesus instructed His disciples in Gethsemane to pray that they would not succumb to temptation as the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.²⁵

The Scriptures are clear. We ought to pray not only that we would be spared from temptation, but also that we would be strengthened when we are tested and tried so that we may endure. Similar to our friend who shared about the diagnosis in a car ride conversation, we should trust God when He makes a way of escape and when He calls us to endurance. Christians who follow the model of Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6 should understand that God is more than capable of using the trials we face to purify us and to cause us to trust Him more deeply.

BIG IDEA: We should boldly pray for escape from temptation and also for endurance in circumstances of temptation.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Read James 1:2-4 and consider how this passage applies to situations in your life right now. Spend time in prayer.

²¹ See Matthew 4 for reference.

²² See the specific temptations of Matthew 4 for examples.

²³ A Greek word which is translated into English as trial, test, and temptation.

²⁴ See James 1:2-4, James 1:12-15, and I Peter 1:6-9 for reference.

²⁵ See Mark 14:32-42 for reference.

Week 10: Matthew 6:9-15

Day 4: Two Tough Questions to Consider

READ: Matthew 6:9-15

EXPLORE:

Most of the Word to Life Studies focus on a specific concept or context related to the biblical text. Today, we will address two tough questions which arise particularly when we study vv. 13-15.

QUESTION: Where is the last part of verse 13?

A lot of my (Stephen's) friends were Catholic growing up. On rare occasions, either before a sporting event or in a visit with them to Mass, we would recite the Lord's Prayer.²⁶ As a Protestant, this always brought a welcome moment of unity... until we reached the end of Jesus' prayer of course. When the prayer drew to a close in v. 13, I found myself awkwardly continuing, *"For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen."*

If you are reading Matthew 6 online or in most physical study Bibles, you will see a footnote that explained my confusion and awkwardly solo rendition of the Lord's Prayer. The earliest and best manuscripts we have of Matthew 6 do not include the italicized phrase I repeated by myself. It is most likely that a scribe in a later century who was copying Matthew's writing inappropriately included the additional phrase. Almost certainly, the addition which the scribe included was often quoted as a part of early church worship even though Matthew did not originally pen those words.

There is nothing theologically wrong with the wording of the additional phrase, but we should be careful and wise when studying that which was originally spoken by Jesus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recorded by Matthew, copied diligently by scribes, and meticulously preserved for our reading today. A good study Bible will mention that the later scribal addition in Matthew 6:13 is made in reference to I Chronicles 29:11-13. Although, we should not be resistant to praying concerning the kingdom, power, and glory of God, we should be intellectually aware

²⁶ It is often called the "Our Father" prayer in different streams of Christianity.

that this phrase was most likely not original to the Holy Spirit's inspiration of Matthew's Account. Pastorally, let me add that this particular topic should not lead you to question the validity of Scripture. In fact, quite the opposite should take place. The level of prayerful, scholarly, and diligent research that has gone into our Scriptures today is astounding and deserving of our admiration.

Question: Are we only able to be forgiven by God if we have forgiven everyone else?

The New Testament is clear that we are saved by God's grace through faith alone and not because of good works. Jesus is not teaching in vv. 14-15 that we are forgiven ultimately by God because we have forgiven everyone else perfectly. Jesus' words should certainly challenge us, however.

People who have been forgiven because of the Gospel of Jesus, will be eager for reconciliation and forgiveness. For example, if we think we can be indwelt by God's Holy Spirit and yet have an attitude that doesn't war against bitter unforgiveness, we may be deluded in regard to our salvation.

In Matthew 7:16-20 and elsewhere, Jesus will make the case that the faith of Christians will be known by the fruit in made visible in their lives. We need to notice the purposeful order that Jesus articulates. We are not saved because of good fruit. The good fruit shows that the metaphorical "tree" of our life has been made good by faith in Jesus alone. It has been rightly summarized that good works are not performed for salvation, but they will necessarily be produced as a result of salvation. Forgiveness will overflow in the lives of those who have been graciously redeemed by God.

BIG IDEA: Whether it is a question about what the Scriptures say or what they mean, our study of Matthew 6:9-15 reminds us that God's Word is good and it is trustworthy.

- **Question:** How do Jesus' words in vv. 14-15 connect to what was earlier instructed in vv. 9-13?

Week 10: Matthew 6:9-15

Day 5: The Lord's Prayer

READ TOGETHER: Revelation 4:11, Revelation 5:9-14

***Instructions:** We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Jesus does not only instruct us how to pray or where to pray, but also what to pray. The Lord's prayer is the greatest prayer ever prayed. It is perfect in majesty, length, and scope. It ought to be memorized and prayed over often by every Christian. Sometimes evangelicals can be wary of praying the Lord's prayer because we can associate it with Roman Catholicism. However, we ought not be timid of praying it simply because some can abuse or distort it. It is meant to be mediated upon, prayed, and studied by all who name the name of Christ. I (Sabino) believe that if all Christians in America sincerely prayed through the Lord's prayer each day, we would experience revival and our whole world would be changed. Therefore, Satan does everything in his power to keep the church from lifting up this prayer to God.

We do not have the time to break down each line of this prayer, so we will focus our attention to the first two petitions of this prayer. The first petition is "Hallowed be your name". This petition is a request that God's name may be honored by us and all men. Imagine if the church and all people everywhere honored the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Of course, this will be so in God's eternal kingdom.



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