

Session 2 Overview of the Sermon on the Mount

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

Father, I ask You for the spirit of inspiration and the spirit of understanding and revelation to touch our heart and strengthen our spirit as we approach this most significant passage of Scripture that Your Son taught us on the grace of God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, last week we looked at the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, and in this session we'll give an overview in order to see the big picture, the landscape of the subjects that Jesus addresses in this most significant sermon called the Sermon on the Mount. We'll stay on this topic for probably several months during the weekend meetings. So start gearing and preparing yourself to begin to study this passage of Scripture in a new and fresh way.

Well, this is a road map. These three chapters give us the overall sense of what God wants in terms of His interaction with His people. It's the lifestyle, it's the character development that He's aiming at, and so we want to be aiming at the same target that the Lord is aiming at.

HOW DO WE LEARN TO LOVE GOD IN A PRACTICAL WAY?

Over the years I've heard people say, "I want to love God with all my heart, but it seems a little mystical. I don't really know how to do that. What am I supposed to do in a concrete way to love God with all my heart and to fully give myself to Him? You know, just cry in worship meetings? Is that what it means to love God? It seems a bit mystical."

Well, the Lord Jesus gives us these three chapters to explain in a very practical way what He wants us to do in our quest to love Him with all of our heart. Not only does He want us to live out the Sermon on the Mount; He wants us to teach it to others.

Now for most of us our teaching ministry is twos and threes; sometimes tens and twenties, but we're all called to teach the Word, starting, in most cases, in informal conversations with those closest to us in our homes and lives. And so to live the Sermon on the Mount and to teach others to live it, to inspire others to walk it out, is the ministry assignment of every single disciple of Jesus.

Someone says, "I want to really give myself to something, to focus on and make a radical difference. I want something to fight for!"

I say, "There you have it. Study the Sermon on the Mount. Seek to completely obey it as best you know how in every season of your life, and then talk about it continually to other people."

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: THE CONSTITUTION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Paragraph A. To review from last week: I refer to the Sermon on the Mount as "the Constitution of the Kingdom of God." It's Jesus' most comprehensive statement on how a believer cooperates with the grace of God.

The Sermon on the Mount is all about grace teaching; it *is* grace teaching.

Jesus is the best teacher on the grace of God. The reason I say that is because some people say, “I’m really into grace. I’m not into that intense stuff, like the Sermon on the Mount.” And I remind them that Jesus is the teacher of the Sermon on the Mount, and He’s really good about the subject of grace. He really knows it well.

“BE PERFECT, JUST AS YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN IS PERFECT”

The high point, the pinnacle of what Jesus is after is that we would make it our primary life goal to walk in perfect obedience. Jesus said, “Be perfect, like My Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48, paraphrased). Now that sounds a bit overwhelming and out of reach, but He’s using the word *perfect* in our sense in a relative way. He’s saying, “Walk in all the light that you have in every season of your spiritual life.” God walks in all the light that He has, and you do the same. Everyone can do this; a new believer can walk in all the light that they have, meaning what God has shown them to do. They don’t have that much light, but they can walk in all of it. They can actually walk in verse 48 from the first week of their conversion.

EIGHT BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS IN THE GARDEN OF OUR HEART

Well, if loving God seems a little mystical and you don’t know quite what to do, if you’re saying, “Obeying with all of my heart? Exactly what do You want? Break it down, Jesus.” He does just that; He gives us the eight Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12.

These eight Beatitudes, these values, these character traits, they’re values, but they’re more than that. They’re virtues and character traits that lead to behavior. And so they’re virtues, values that lead to lived behavior. I think of them as eight flowers in the garden of our heart. The Lord wants all eight of these flowers, these beautiful flowers, to come to full maturity in our life. That’s what it means to obey God perfectly, to walk in all the light in reference to these eight virtues or values.

GOD’S COMMANDMENTS ALWAYS BRING THE PROMISE OF THEIR OWN ENABLING

Now the good news is that when God gives us a command, there’s always the promise of the enabling to obey the command. He never commands us to do anything that He won’t help us to do. The point is this: these Beatitudes aren’t out of reach of anyone, not even the newest believer. It is within your reach to walk in the light that God gives you in every season of your life.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE EIGHT BEATITUDES

Let’s read these eight Beatitudes. This is the core message. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Mt. 5:3): that is, those who have a profound sense of need, poverty of spirit. We’ll look at each of these in detail in this series in the next number of months.

“Blessed are those who mourn” (Mt. 5:4). This isn’t mourning over circumstances, but mourning for the breakthrough; mourning to walk with God in greater wholeheartedness.

“Blessed are the meek” (Mt. 5:5). Those who are meek are the humble. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (v. 6). Now this is where pressing into God comes in: hungering and thirsting, refusing to be denied in our pursuit after the deeper things of God.

Now some people, their definition of the grace of God is that they don’t press into God. They have a distorted message of the grace of God which is very common today. And that distorted message is increasing. However,

Jesus taught on the necessity and the glory and the liberty of hungering and thirsting and pressing hard in the grace of God.

“Blessed are the merciful” (Mt. 5:7). “Blessed are the pure in heart” (v. 8). “Blessed are the peacemakers” (v. 9). And, finally, “Blessed are those who endure persecution with a rejoicing spirit” (v. 10, paraphrased).

And so now we know what Jesus is aiming for, and we say, “OK, we know what it looks like to walk perfectly; to obey God perfectly as our heavenly Father, to walk in the light.”

Now the question is, “How are we going to grow in these eight? I mean, we’ve got them down. We don’t fully understand them, but we’ve got them down and we know where we’re aiming.”

Paragraph B. In a moment we’ll see how Jesus identifies six common temptations that He wants us to resist. And then He identifies five kingdom activities that He wants us to pursue. We need to pursue and resist. There are negatives that we resist and there are positives that we pursue.

Now some camps in the Body of Christ focus on resisting the negatives. Other camps focus on pursuing the positives. However, when Jesus taught on the grace of God, He said, “Don’t choose between the two; do them together.” There’s a pursuing and there’s a resisting element of growing in the grace of God.

I use the analogy of the garden, the watering and the weeding. There are eight flowers in this analogy, these eight Beatitudes. For the flower to grow in a proper way, we have to weed the garden and remove the hindrances. And we have to water the garden, and add the nutrients. And so there’s a removing of the negative: those six temptations we resist. We’re pulling the weeds and driving the hindrances out of the garden of our heart. Then there’s the adding of the nutrients: those five kingdom activities.

COSTLY AND DEMANDING, BUT LIBERATING AND GLORIOUS

Let’s look at Matthew 5:13, which follows right after the Beatitudes. The next thing He addresses is meant to be an encouragement. He’s saying, “These eight will be costly and demanding, but they’re liberating and glorious! Let Me encourage you!” the Lord would say. “The people who embrace these eight Beatitudes and pursue them will be salt and light. I have a plan to change the whole world, and I won’t do it by myself, but rather I will do it in relationship with my people. My people will be change agents. They’ll be world-changers, My people.”

And so He’s saying, “I want to encourage you that I have big plan, a glorious plan, and you have a part of it. However, in order for you to have a relevant part in that plan, you have to pursue the eight Beatitudes.”

THE SALT OF THE EARTH AND THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

It’s significant that the eight Beatitudes are given in verses 3-12, and the “salt and light” promise is right here following in verses and 14. In other words, the two are connected; He didn’t change subjects. The reason I say that is because a lot of folks, when they talk about salt and light, begin the dialogue at verse 13, and they need to begin the dialogue with the Beatitudes. There’s no effective changing of the world apart from people who are pursuing these eight Beatitudes.

Well, we’re salt and we’re light. As salt, we make people thirsty for Jesus. Salt makes food taste better and creates thirst, and so by living the way we live in the eight Beatitudes, people become thirsty and hungry for

God. God tastes better to their palate, their spiritual palate, when they see the truth through people who are salt. And salt is also a preservative. It stops the encroaching decay of sinful society.

However, God's people are more than salt; they're light. They show the direction in a dark world of how to please God and what will last forever—that which is meaningful and true; the truth about God. And light not only shows direction; light is critical to the processes of life. It enhances life. And so Jesus is saying, "I will change the world, and you will be involved with Me. You have a relevant place in this age." But in a moment He's going to link it to the age to come, because the two ages have continuity from God's point of view. What we do in this age and how we affect the world in the age to come are dynamically connected. However, the point I want to stress is that it's people walking in the eight Beatitudes that are salt and light: not just by virtue of being born again but by being born again and trying to walk out biblical Christianity.

Well, the question arises: "OK, God, You're going to change the world. You're committed to it and You have a plan. To what degree are You going to change the world: a little or a lot? How intense are You about this plan to transform the planet?"

In verse 17 and verse 18 Jesus makes it very clear. He says, "Don't think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets; I came to fulfill them" (Mt. 5:17-18, paraphrased). The moral standards of the Law are found in the Old Testament. He didn't come to nullify those laws, or the promises and purposes set forth by the Old Testament prophets.

Rather, Jesus is saying, "The same plan that I committed to through the prophets to transform the whole earth is still on course. You're salt and light. How far will it go? I will transform the entire planet and fill the earth with the glory of God. That's how far it's going. Read Isaiah and Jeremiah if you want to see how far I'm taking this. I will take the moral commandments and fill the earth with righteousness, humility, and love in the fullest sense. And I will transform all of society as well"—because it's not just about moral virtues coming to their fullness. It's about the application of those virtues in every realm of society. The earth will be filled with the glory of God; that's what Jesus is saying.

He says, "Don't think I'm setting aside the Old Testament promises or the Old Testament standards. I'll bring them to absolute completion on a global level and they'll be fully and permanently fulfilled." And so that's how far it's going.

And so we're encouraged, OK? Equipped with these eight Beatitudes, we will be useful in changing the world. Eventually the world is going to be ultimately and permanently and fully changed. Now we're salt and light in this age, and we make a real impact in this age, and though the impact is a small percent, it's real. When Jesus returns, the impact is brought to its full, global, permanent, and comprehensive dimension. We won't have full impact until He returns. Some people teach that, but that's not a biblical idea, that it will get better and better and better and then finally it will get so good that Jesus returns. Wrong! That's not biblical. We will have great advances in society in terms of God's power affecting the world. However, the darkness will get darker while the light gets lighter, but our impact is real and substantial; it matters. And then there's continuity to the impact we make in this age to what Jesus does in fullness in the age to come—when everything promised in the Old Testament Law and Prophets comes to pass.

YOU GET TO DECIDE THE LEVEL AT WHICH YOU WANT TO BE INVOLVED

Well, the disciple says, “I love it! I see the connection of the eight Beatitudes to salt and light. And I see how far salt and light is going; it will fill the earth with the glory of God and everything that is promised will come to pass. Awesome!”

“Here’s my next question,” the disciple might say. “Lord, what role do I have in this? I want to be a part in this age but I want to be a part also for billions of years in this great global transformation and this glory of God filling the earth. I want a role, not just in my seventy years on the earth; I want a role in this forever.”

And the Lord would say, “Good. I have a wonderful, eternal-world changing plan and you have a role in it.”

“Well to what degree can I be involved?” And the Lord’s answer is found in verse 19: “You get to decide the level at which you want to be involved; it’s up to you” (Mt. 5:19, paraphrased). Our function in the age to come will be linked to our responsiveness in this age.

And so He says, “It’s your call. How involved do you want to be?”

“I want to be involved as much as You’ll involve a human being.”

“OK, good! Well, you know how to do that, don’t you?”

He talks about the one who breaks the least of these commandments and teaches others to break them. He’s still born again, still in the kingdom, but he will be least in the kingdom in the age to come. “But if a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, does and teaches these commandments, they will be called great” (Mt. 5:19-20, paraphrased).

Now, in the age to come, we will all be loved equally. We will have equal significance in love from the Father, but we will have varying prominence, function, authority, and measure of glory. And so we have equal significance, but we will vary in our function and glory, and it’s all related to what we do in this age.

In verse 19, Jesus says, “If you break these commandments...” Now in this context He’s talking about the eight Beatitudes. Many people teach a doctrine of the grace of God which essentially says, “Chill out, be irresponsible, live in an undisciplined way, and claim grace.”

Jesus said, “If you live that way and you minimize these commandments and you teach others to do the same, you’ll live in My kingdom but you’ll be least.” However, if you go in the other direction, if you set your heart to live out those eight Beatitudes, and not only that, but you take a stand and teach them, you will be called great.

Now again, most people’s teaching ministry is twos and threes, tens and twenties. He said, “If you do, that you’ll be great.” Talk often about these eight Beatitudes, and teach them in informal ways. I don’t mean take out teaching notes and tell your friends, “OK, I’m giving you a Bible teaching.” I’m talking about your conversation, in both formal and informal settings, when appropriate, whether in the workplace, in the home, in the neighborhood, in social gatherings, centering around your challenges, your commitments, your excitement, and your insights into the eight Beatitudes and what they mean in a practical way. Teach them!

THE EIGHT BEATITUDES ARE SURPRISINGLY UNPOPULAR

Now if you've never taught people these eight Beatitudes, you might be surprised that they're very unpopular. And they're offensive to the natural mind; to our fleshly mindset, they're very offensive. And so until you start talking about them, you won't know why Jesus gives a premium promise for the people who will talk about them. Most people find it easier to minimize them, which is what He warned them not to do, and to teach others. "Man, I'm so in the grace of God, I don't have to hunger and thirst. I don't have to press in with meekness. I don't have to walk in that kind of purity. I mean, He loves me, and I love Him, and that settles it."

Jesus said, "Don't take that approach. Don't minimize what I'm telling you right now. Emphasize it; go the other direction."

EVERYONE THINKS MERCY IS GREAT UNTIL HE HAS TO SHOW MERCY TO SOMEONE

Someone says, "Well those eight Beatitudes don't seem that bad to the natural, carnal mind. Just teach them. I mean, people love those eight Beatitudes! 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'? It's like poetry."

Beloved, this isn't poetry. This is how Jesus wants us to live as a practical lifestyle.

You say, "How can people be upset? I mean, 'Blessed are the merciful!'" And they imagine people romanticizing about how much they love mercy, because they're picturing some guy in a far away part of the earth, a nameless, faceless guy they don't know, and they love the poor person. They've never met the poor person. The poor person has never insulted them. They don't know anything about him, but they love mercy in a really romanticized way. Or the gang leader gets saved and he comes to the altar, and everyone cries: "Thank You for the mercy of God!"

That's not the mercy He's talking about. Everyone loves that mercy; that's an easy message. He's talking about the mercy of the brother that's on your worship team who is stealing from you and lying about you. The Lord says, "Give him mercy."

"Ooo, I don't like mercy." When it affects you, you think, "That is an intense message!" Mercy is an invasive message. It's easy to have mercy as long as the person doesn't come near you and steal things from you and lie about you.

Jesus says, "That is the arena for mercy."

"Oh. Well, that's a different subject. This isn't as popular as I thought, these eight Beatitudes."

Beloved, these eight Beatitudes are worth fighting for. Learn them, teach them, take a stand and fill the earth with these Beatitudes, as much as you have influence. And your influence may be very small but fill up your time and energy with getting this message out and talking people into it.

BEING A WORLD-CHANGER STARTS WITH CHANGING OUR OWN HEART

Roman numeral IV. Well, how do we really live out these eight Beatitudes? I've already mentioned it: the watering and the weeding are critical. We have to resist certain things and we have to pursue certain things. That is how we practically respond to be a world-changer.

You hear it a lot these days: “Be a world-changer!” People cheer: “I want to be a world changer!” However, we have to read the fine print, which is actually the most emphasized part of the world-changing message of salt and light: the eight Beatitudes. Jesus didn’t hide it in a corner. Being a world-changer starts with changing our own heart: that what we experience, what we pursue, what we go after, giving of ourselves to others and bringing them on the journey with us; what we’re challenged by; what we’re intrigued by; what we’re perplexed by: we share that journey to influence them to go on the journey of filling their life with these eight Beatitudes.

WHEN WE FIGHT FOR LOYALTY, ALL OUR RELATIONSHIPS ARE STRENGTHENED

Well, what are these six temptations? We’ll look at each one of them in the weeks to come with a certain measure of detail. And each one of these six has many levels of expression from the very beginning. Anger, for example, goes from the initial, beginning stirrings—having a critical spirit and being defensive—all the way, twenty-five steps later, to murder. And Jesus says, “Anger is all of that.” And so there are many levels to each of these six; it’s not just superficial. He said, “Resist anger; resist adultery, the spirit of immorality. Resist the temptation to disregard the sanctity of marriage.” What that ultimately means is this: “Be loyal in all your relationships, even outside of marriage.” It’s the virtue of loyalty in relationship, beginning with the marriage covenant: when times are good and when times are bad; not disregarding what God says about that covenant. And then it will affect all of the other relationships, because something happens in us when we fight for loyalty when we don’t feel like being loyal; it affects all of relationships in a positive way.

RESIST THE TEMPTATION OF MAKING FALSE COMMITMENTS

The temptation of making false commitments: Jesus said “Let your yes be yes; don’t oversell yourself” (Mt. 5:37, paraphrased). The man says, “I’m committed to this and that!” and everyone says, “Wow, what an amazing brother! He’s so cool!” And he gets the applause because he’s so committed, but in the next three months he doesn’t follow through. And Jesus says, “Resist that, because it’s falsehood. Live in the truth concerning your words and what you say.”

RESPONDING TO MISTREATMENT WITH CREATIVE COMPASSION

Resist the temptation of retaliation. Then, the most difficult, I believe, of all the six is the last one: being inactive when we’re mistreated. I believe this is the most challenging to our flesh. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus said, “Bless your enemies; love them; bless and pray for those who spitefully use you” (Mt. 5:44, paraphrased).

Now we can get to a certain place in the grace of God where we don’t fight them back. We don’t answer insult for insult and we don’t attack them when they attack us, and that’s good. And we decide, “Wow, what a victory; I’m just going to be quiet.”

And the Lord says, “No, that’s not good enough; you can’t just be quiet. That’s the problem. That’s a passive distance from your adversaries. No, I want you actively loving them.”

“OK, what?”

“Bless them.”

“Agh, OK: ‘Lord, bless them.’”

“No, no a little more detail than that. Do good to them.”

“You mean like give them money and open doors for them? What?”

“Pray for them.”

Remember, we will break this down in the days to come. It’s way better to have kind of a sense of victory, and it’s a victory to not answer back or not to attack back. I mean that’s a huge sense of victory. But the Lord says, “You’re not even halfway there. I actually want you to actively engage in blessing them.” I mean, there’s nothing more like God than this. He even says, “You will be called sons of God. You’ll be called like Your Father who does this. This is My nature” (Mt. 5:45, paraphrased).

I remember some years ago I decided, “Well, that’s what it says, so I’ll do it.” And so I closed my eyes and prayed, “Lord I ask You to bless... well, don’t bless him too much. Because then he’ll start thinking everything is OK, and everything isn’t OK with this guy! However, he needs to know it, and so if You overdo it, Lord, it will mess up the whole thing.” I don’t remember exactly what I said, but that’s the gist of it.

And the Lord said, “No, bless him.”

“Lord, give him favor and finance... no, give it to his kids, not to him; it’ll bless him if his kids get it. That’s good, that’s good enough!”

It was hard! I mean, it’s easy to underline it in your Bible and talk about loving your enemies, bless them, and pray for them, but not ever actually do it. It’s a violent heart exchange to do this with truth. Jesus said, “If you pull those weeds out of the garden, you’ll remove hindrances and those eight flowers will grow.”

MAKE IT YOUR LIFE VISION TO WALK IN ALL THE LIGHT YOU HAVE

Paragraph C. Then He brings it to a culmination here in verse 48: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father . . . in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48, KJV). Walk in all the light that you have. Beloved, there’s a moment in a believer’s life. I mean, many believers twenty and thirty years later are living in the same superficial place in the grace of God where they were twenty years ago. I’ve seen that many, many, many times. I would even go so far as to say that the majority of the people I’ve known that were on fire for five or ten years have been stuck for the last ten to twenty in a superficial experience of God, and they’re OK with it. However, if you’re really going to go on to know the Lord and really press in, there’s a day, there’s a time, when the light goes on, and there’s a moment when this verse literally becomes your life vision.

You say, “I’m really going to do it!” Not just talk about it; not just sing about it. Now it’s good to talk and sing about it; but you’re saying, “I actually want to seek to obey God in every area, for real. With my time, my money, my words, literally I will do this.” Beloved, when that light goes on it will shift something in your inner man and it will set you on a different mindset. You’ll read different things. You’ll talk differently in conversations. You’ll study different things. You’ll focus on different things. You’ll have a different preoccupation on the inside, even though you loved God even before that.

Roman numeral V. Well, it’s not enough just to resist the negative; we have to pursue the positive. And so Jesus gives five kingdom activities: to serve, to give money; to pray; to bless our adversaries; and to fast.

Now here in Matthew 6:4 He said, “When you do a charitable deed. . .” (Mt. 6:3). Now the charitable deed has two dimensions. There’s a dimension of the act of serving. It’s a deed that’s done. But there’s a dimension of it being charitable as well. There’s an economic dimension as well. Now this doesn’t just mean the work you do in the outreach to the poor. All of your service, whether you’re giving money or your own time and energy, is charitable deeds. It’s not just the outreach to the poor.

For example, I love our shuttle drivers. If they all quit right now and you walk back to the Red Bridge Center, it’s a cold February morning! You’ll realize how charitable those guys are who are driving those buses. All of our services are charitable deeds; they’re in this category.

He said, “I want you to do it, and your heavenly Father will reward you” (Mt. 6:4, paraphrased). “Pray, and your heavenly Father will reward you” (v. 6, paraphrased). Now the scope of New Testament forgiveness always includes Matthew 5:44, the blessing of your enemies and doing good to them. It’s not just the cancelling of the debt, overcoming the offense of what they did. It never stops when you can say, “OK, we’re in neutral now. I’m not mad. I’m not offended. I’ve cancelled it. We’re in neutral.” No, forgiveness when Jesus talks about it always means forgiveness to its fullness, which includes blessing them. And so that is why I put the words, “Blessing our adversaries.”

Verse 17. “When you fast . . .” (Mt. 6:17). He didn’t say *if*; He said *when*.

How often should you fast? In every season of your life it may be different. One season you’ll fast more than another season, but fasting is part of the lifestyle of New Testament Christianity in the grace of God. Fasting doesn’t earn anything; it positions us to receive what is freely given to us. I encourage people just as a target to aim for one day a week. And in some seasons of their life they may not do it; other seasons they might do a little more than that, but I say, “You throw it out there and that’s your target.” And then again, you’ll walk it out with different intensity in different seasons.

In verse 20, He returns to the subject that He brought up in verse 4: the issue of money. When He talks about treasure in heaven, He’s saying that when you invest your physical money into the kingdom, you’ll receive a return when you arrive in heaven.

Paragraph B: Spiritual disciplines don’t earn us God’s love. Jesus wasn’t presenting the Sermon on the Mount with the spiritual disciplines suggesting that we earn God’s love; quite the opposite. What we’re doing is putting our cold heart before His bonfire. When you put a cold heart before that bonfire, that frozen heart gets warmed and tenderized. The power is in the fire, the presence of God. The power isn’t in putting our self in front of it. The fire is free; we just have to put our self close enough to it by posturing our mind to where the heat of His grace warms our heart.

Because many people conceive of the grace of God as going to heaven when they die, but they have such a spiritually dull heart. They have such darkness and dullness and heaviness and lack of desire for God’s presence and for His Word. And though they have grace in the sense that it has been freely given, and it has in fact all been given to them, their experience of it is so minimal. And so yes, reject doing spiritual disciplines with a wrong spirit; reject that. Don’t do spiritual disciplines, giving, serving, fasting, and praying with a wrong spirit. Reject a wrong spirit, but don’t reject the spiritual discipline when you throw out the wrong spirit.

It's very common for people to throw the baby out with the bathwater. They're getting rid of the wrong spirit, but they throw the discipline away. I've seen many do that over the years. They say, "You know what? I was fasting and praying to earn God's love. I'm done with that."

I say, "Good, that's awesome!"

And what they really mean is, "I'm done with fasting and praying."

I say, "No, no be done with the wrong spirit, not with the practice. This was Jesus who taught the practice. You won't do any better than Jesus teaching on the grace of God."

And so I tell them, "Let's settle the issue. When you fast and pray you don't earn anything. Let's take ten minutes and let's settle the issue." Don't take ten years to live in spiritual laziness and lethargy and disobedience to the Sermon on the Mount to figure out what you can easily settle in ten minutes; get rid of the wrong spirit, the spirit of legalism. Don't live spiritually lazy for the next ten years because you had this awakening that you were fasting with a wrong spirit. Settle it with God right now; for the people right now let's take ten minutes and I'll settle it for you. Don't wander out there with a dull spirit for the next ten years because now you're free from earning it.

APPROACHING GOD WITH CONFIDENCE THAT HE IS AND HE REWARDS US

Let's look at the middle of page three. Roman numeral VI. Well, there's resisting the negative, the temptations. There's pursuing the positive, these spiritual disciplines, these five kingdom activities. Now Jesus introduces a third principle: knowing the truth. And I'm using the word *confidence*. We resist the negative. We pursue the positive, and we know the truth about God and the truth about how God views us. That gives us confidence. Because if we don't have confidence, if we don't know what God is like and how He views us, then we're resisting the bad and pursuing the good, but with a spirit of condemnation and a spirit of fear. And we end up with a wrong spirit, trying to water and weed that garden, but without confidence that even in our weakness God enjoys us. He's looking at us; He's responding to us. He's attentive to us; That's what Jesus is saying here at the end of Matthew 6. Know the truth while you're resisting and pursuing.

The book of Hebrews was written for believers who were struggling under persecution, and were growing weary. That's the context of Hebrews 11. And the writer of Hebrews says this: "Without faith"—and you can use the word *confidence*—"it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). This was written to persecuted believers. When you approach Him in your prayer life and in your everyday life in God, here's what you must do. You must believe two things: that He is, and that He is a rewarder (ibid). You must believe those two things: He is and He's a rewarder. To believe that He is means to believe in the present tense that He's attentive and he will intervene. Believe that He's listening. He is, in the present tense, attentive to your life. That's what that verse means. He is, and it's in His nature to intervene.

"HE IS A REWARDER OF THOSE WHO DILIGENTLY SEEK HIM"

And there's another thing that we must believe, that "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6b): that not only is He attentive and He intervenes, but He remembers and rewards forever. This is a very important part. The subject of rewards was taught more by Jesus than by any other man in the Bible. There's a diligence that He's rewarding. He does reward diligence. Diligence doesn't make God love us; He loved us

when we hated Him. However, when we respond in diligence, He responds with rewards in this age, but primarily in the age to come.

JESUS IS CALLING US OUT OF THE SLAVERY OF THE FEAR OF NOT HAVING ENOUGH

Paragraph B. What Jesus is talking about is the necessity of pursuing Him in wholeheartedness but with confidence especially related to our finances and our possessions because that is where people have the most fear. That's where the stronghold of fear moves in related to finances and possessions, and that is what Jesus is addressing. Because we can't progress in the eight Beatitudes in an optimum way when we have a stronghold of fear in our life. Jesus is calling us out of the slavery of the fear of not having enough. That's the predominant fear, the fear of not having enough. And Jesus said, "I want you to have confidence when you're pursuing Me that in the major issue, where fear gets a stronghold in the lives of My people, you won't yield to that but you'll have confidence that I'm rewarding you. And you'll have confidence that I'm providing for you and that I'm watching. And if you have that confidence, if you know the truth about Me, you'll know that I'm a God who intervenes. I'm a God who rewards. I'm a God who watches. I'm a God who is moved by the response of My people."

Well, how does it work? It's really simple. First, God initiates. He stirs us up even when we don't have a thought of seeking Him. He initiates and awakens us. Even as a believer we're stuck in dullness; He initiates, He wakes us up. We say, "Wow!" He initiates; then we respond. And then He responds to our response.

And so He's on both sides of our response. He initiates it. We say, "Wow! I'll obey."

And then when we obey, the Lord says, "Good, now I will respond to your obedience." You don't earn anything, because He's on both sides of the equation of our response.

Paragraph D. Now He gives us this promise: "If you'll do these things, if you'll make it your life vision to teach and obey the eight Beatitudes..." He calls it "having a good eye." He's talking about the eye of your heart (Mt. 6:22). He says, "You'll have a vibrant spirit; you'll be full of life. If you'll stick with this, not for a summer, not for a year; make it your primary vision to go after this with all your heart in a consistent way."

Yes, we will have failures, plenty of failures, but when we fail, we sign back up. He said, "You'll be full of light. You'll have a vibrant spirit."

RELATIONAL DYNAMICS WILL CHANGE WHEN YOU FOLLOW THE PATH OF LOVE

Now He addresses an entirely different subject. Because here they are in Matthew 5 and 6: they're ready to go! They're pursuing the eight Beatitudes. They're resisting the bad stuff. They're pursuing the right stuff and they have the knowledge of the truth that God is watching and they have confidence in God and they're going hard. Their eye is good. They have a clear vision. They're going after this. Now what?

Now I believe that one of the primary things that He's doing in Matthew 7 is addressing how we can be derailed and sidetracked and lose our passion and our pursuit of the things in chapter 5 and chapter 6. Because when we seek to live the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle, we spend our time differently, we spend our time differently and our speech is different. We talk about different things and we talk in a different way. I don't mean we use a confusing language, but we're preoccupied with the details of living this out in our life. And with our friends we talk about these things.

Now a person who pursues this will create all kinds of unusual relational dynamics. In marriage, if a couple doesn't go together, there's trouble. One of them says, "I want to give more money away" and the other one says, "Not a chance."

You know, there are two friends in the neighborhood, and the guy across the street is a troublemaker, and you say, "Well, I want to do good and I want to help them."

And your neighbor says, "No way! What are you, weird? I'm not going there!"

Or you're in the marketplace with a believer, and when you start obeying these things in a literal way, it will cause trouble all around you. People are unsettled by this. Now some people will be encouraged and others will be unsettled. Dynamics will change in relationships; that's what Jesus is preparing them for.

DON'T BE CRITICAL OF THOSE WITH LESS INTENSITY THAN YOU

Paragraph B. Now right off the bat He says, "Here's one of the number one problems that will derail you in your pursuit." It's being critical of a brother who agrees to walk out the Sermon on the Mount, but has less intensity than you. And he has less follow through than you, and you feel critical towards him. Jesus says, "That will actually shut you down. That critical spirit will actually put the fire out inside of you."

Now here in Matthew 7:5-6, He describes two types of people, and both of them can have a negative impact on the red-hot believer if the red-hot believer isn't paying attention and alert in his spirit.

In verse 5 is the brother with less intensity. He's so close to you in relationship that you could actually pull the speck out of his eye. He's agreeing that he's going to walk in this obedience. The speck speaks of a deficiency in his commitment to God. He isn't living far away; he's right next to you, he's a brother, and he's committed to walk in this way, and you're going to help him. And that's good if it's done in a right way. He isn't a stranger. This is a guy who says, "I'm going for it," but the trouble is, you get bothered because he doesn't really want to go for it and that bugs you.

"No one else is committed but me!" Don't get into that Elijah syndrome. Elijah said, "I'm the only one committed. Everyone is backslidden. I'm the only one seeking the eight Beatitudes. All my friends say it, but they don't do it."

And the Lord says, "No, don't, don't, don't, *don't* go there! Don't go there."

Now why doesn't He want us to go there with a critical spirit? Well, for several reasons, but here's the one I want to highlight. I mean, we can damage and hassle and trouble the brother that we're criticizing. That's an obvious reason, and a biblical reason, that Jesus and the apostles would address in other places. However, I don't believe that's the reason He has in focus right here. I believe that when we get a critical attitude towards a brother that's not obeying God and the Sermon on the Mount like we are, it changes the conversation inside of you. That's the big problem.

Here's what I mean. In Matthew 5 and 6 you're talking to God. You're wanting to bless your enemies. You're wanting to do good to the bad people. You're wanting to fast and pray. You're seeking to grow in the eight

Beatitudes. However, there's a brother who claims to go with you in it, but he comes up short. Jesus hasn't addressed that yet.

And here you are, you're running well, you're going hard after God, and Jesus is saying, "Beware. If you get your eyes on him instead of talking to Me about your life, you'll be talking to yourself about your brother and talking to other people. The conversation changed. I want to be in the conversation with you," the Lord says. "And when you're criticizing your brother, I'm not in the conversation with you anymore. You've changed channels. You've gone in a different direction. Get back! Talk to me!"

In verse 5 He says, "Pull the log out of your own eye" (Mt. 7:5, paraphrased)! He says, "Talk to Me about *you!* Let's get back in the conversation again; that's when we do so well together."

I've seen people going hard after God, and they fall into thinking, "Yeah, that guy's not, he's not, she's not..." They get so preoccupied with the wrong conversation that they're not even having it with God anymore, and they actually lose their vibrant spirit and fall into a dull spirit.

Well, verse 6 is the second guy. This isn't a brother you're close enough to and you care enough about to pull a speck out of his eye. Verse 6. Look at this. This is a person who's adversarial towards you. They strongly disagree with you. They feel hostility towards you. You give them your pearls. And Jesus said, "Watch out! They will trample you. They will speak badly about you and try to destroy you. They will trample you" (Mt. 7:6, paraphrased).

Now what are your pearls? He isn't saying, "Don't preach Jesus and salvation to them." He's saying, "Don't tell them the details of your commitments. Don't break down that 'I'm giving this much; fasting that much; praying this much; blessing my enemy.'"

This guy will look at you and say, "What are you, a crazy man? What are you talking about? You're dangerous! You're deluded! You're off!" And he will try to trample and destroy you.

Jesus said, "Don't say everything that is true about your walk with Me that is so dear to you. Don't give it to people who don't value it and can't interpret it in a right way." Well, this guy in verse 6 is hostile. And again, we will develop this a bit more when we get there in a few months, as it will probably take us a few months to get to chapter 7.

Let's go on to the next section, verses 7-12. Now this is very interesting, because at first glance it looks like Jesus is giving another teaching on prayer like He did back in Matt 6:5-13. Back in Matthew 6:5-13 He gave quite an extensive teaching on prayer—His biggest teaching on prayer! At first glance it looks like He's just teaching on prayer again; He changed the subject, because the verse before is a hostile, adversarial person wanting to tear your life apart.

"WHATEVER YOU WANT MEN TO DO TO YOU, DO ALSO TO THEM"

Now notice the context of verses 7-12, because understanding the context helps you to apply this, I believe, in the most complete way. Bookend number one: verse 6. It's a hostile person wanting to tear you apart. Bookend number two: verse 12. He says, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Mt. 7:12). The takeaway point is that you would treat people differently.

Now that's a strange takeaway point. If He's teaching on prayer, "Ask, seek, knock," I wouldn't expect the conclusion of the teaching to be, "Oh yeah, by the way, treat people differently." I would expect Him to say, "Ask, seek, knock, and trust God differently," but He doesn't. He says, "Treat people differently."

I remember when I first began to struggle with this, and I said, "What?!" Because you always want to ask, "What is the *therefore* there for?" And so I said, "Lord, it looks like You changed subjects."

And of course He didn't. And I believe what He's talking about is having a God-centered approach to seeking creative solutions to the relational tensions. He says, "When there's the relational tension, don't just use your own natural strength and wit and your own finesse. Talk to Me, ask Me to help, ask Me to break in; seek Me, yes, but even seek to understand him. Knock, knock on the door of heaven and knock on other doors. Are there creative ways to bring redemptive goodness to this person? Have a searching heart to find the creative solution that I'll give you if you'll make it a God-centered approach."

I believe He's talking about solving relational problems. All of these principles relate to prayer, but it's more than prayer. The full scope is this: in verse 6 is someone is about to tear you in pieces, and verse 12 is an exhortation to treat people better. In context, this is about relationships.

And He's saying, "Don't approach relational conflict-solving by your own wit and your own wisdom. Actually seek and ask Me, ask others, get council, talk to them, understand their heart, knock on open doors, and see the goodness that I'll give you and what I'll lead you in. But it's more complex than just you alone praying, saying, 'Lord, You solve it!'"

And He says, "No, I will solve that problem, but I'm going to use you and human processes, and I want you to have a searching heart in the process." That's what I believe He's talking about.

"DIFFICULT IS THE WAY THAT LEADS TO LIFE"

Paragraph D. Now He goes on, and He appears to have changed the subject. I don't believe He does. I believe He's talking about relational conflicts all the way through this chapter, in Matthew 7:1-20. It says in verse 14, "Difficult is the way" (Mt. 7:14). Difficult is the way. Now we know the spiritual disciplines can be difficult. Without grace our flesh says no and we would rather just go easy and not press in. And Jesus says, "The way is difficult." I don't think He's talking mostly about the difficulty of spiritual disciplines from Matthew 6. I don't think He's talking mostly about those, but certainly they're included. Coming from my own pastoral experience, because I've seen this so many times when people run into relational conflict with people in the Body of Christ—they're going hard after God, they're seeking the eight Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, and two people rise up within their relational circle and accuse them and say, "You're selfish! You're arrogant! You're in error and you're stupid!"

And the guy says, "What?! It's not even worth it anymore!"

I've had this conversation so many times in thirty-five years of being a pastor. A guy comes in and says, "You know what? Just forget it."

I say, "Why?"

“Well, you know what? I’ve poured myself out, and you know what response I get? They say I’m stupid. I’m wrong. I’m selfish. Is that all they see? Forget it!”

I say, “Forget it? What is the *it* you’re forgetting?”

“Just *it*! I’m forgetting it!”

“You mean that guy?”

“Oh no, not just him; another guy, too. There are two of them.”

“OK, there are two of them saying you’re selfish, in error, stupid, proud. So you’re giving up your pursuit of God because two guys tell you this?”

I mean, there’s this exaggerated feeling that is common to everyone. It’s an exaggerated sense of peril. “Two of them!”

I say, “Two whole people? And you’re going to throw away your pursuit of God that has eternal ramifications because two whole people think you’re wrong?”

“Yeah, but they’re leaders and they should know better.”

People, I believe that is part of the narrow way: staying in it even in the conflict because you live this lifestyle. I’m telling you, people within the community of God will stand against you. This is hostile to the flesh, these eight Beatitudes. People don’t like that. I think the narrow way is talking about being exasperated and discouraged because of the conflict that you have because all you’re trying to do is obey God. “Why can’t they just leave me alone?!”

They won’t leave you alone because you’re bugging them. Because when you’re just obeying God, they’re kind of assuming that you think they should be obeying God like you and they don’t like that. And they feel insulted and they want to sit you down and set you right. And I tell you, I find that people lose the way really easily.

WOLVES IN SHEEP’S CLOTHING IN THE COMMUNITY OF GOD

Now in verse 15, He’s on the same topic. He’s talking about false prophets. Here’s the problem: a false prophet is in sheep’s clothing in the community of God. They’re blended in. And I think the most damaging message of a false prophet is the false grace message in the Church. It has so much negative ramification, because it gets the people who buy it into a dull spirit and stuck in darkness in their understanding. And then they’re just vulnerable to everything. They’re like sitting ducks for the enemy to shoot off once they get a dull, discouraged, heavy spirit. The enemy can pick them off so easily!

Now these false prophets are false messengers. It’s not a guy with horns: “The False Prophet! There he is! The guy with horns!”

No, he's in the midst. He probably has cool clothes, and a guitar in his hand, and a huge following across the nation, thinking he's awesome. Sometimes he even has a mega-ministry. That's who the false messenger is.

Here's the point: Jesus is saying, "You get discouraged. I mean, you're pressing hard. Don't be seduced by the easy offer out of this lifestyle. They'll give you a broad message. They'll give you an easy way"—because the false prophet of verse 15 and the narrow gate and the broad way of verse 14 are connected. It's the message of the broad way that's brought by the false prophet. Don't buy it!

And so the guy says, "Well, you know, I was going so hard for God. Here I was, and I was really making ground. Peril number one: I got into a negative attitude. No one in my group was seeking God like me." So you lose the conversation; you're not talking to Jesus. Now you're just stewing in the thought of how bad everyone else is. That's peril number one.

Peril number two. You're pressing the envelope: "I fast. I pray. I give. I give all my money. I do this; I do that."

And then the peoples trample you and say, "You're into delusion. You're into deception. You're into legalism." And they say, "Aghhh! That was a bad one!"

And you say, "Lord, help me! Help me solve these problems!" So you seek, knock and ask.

And so now our heart gets weary and the road is difficult, and the Lord says, "Don't give up!"

And now along comes the false prophet with the cool clothes and the cool ministry and says, "You don't need to do that anyway. You don't have to press into God; just chill out and go the broad way! I mean, hey man, we love Jesus. What about love? What about grace?"

And the Lord says, "Don't get seduced!"

THE GENUINENESS OF YOUR LOVE WILL BE TRIED UNDER PRESSURE

And then He ends the sermon here with verses 21-27. Just look at verse 22. On the last day, everyone will stand before God. Many who confess the Lord will have walked in the foolishness that He describes in verse 26. They didn't embrace the kingdom. But He says here in verse 24, "Be the guy who does this stuff—who does it" (Mt. 7:24, paraphrased)!

You do it, in private, under pressure, for the rest of your life. Because here's what this passage is talking about: that our love, our genuine love must be proven as genuine, and it's proven under pressure over time. And so, like Abraham had to offer Isaac, the Lord is saying, "Yes, you committed to Matthew 5 and 6. You weathered the storms of the relational tensions of Matthew 7, but know this: the genuineness of your love will be tried under pressure. And so here's what you commit to: you're going to stick with it in private, not just in public. You're going to stick with this thing under pressure and you're going to stick with these commitments, to this lifestyle for the rest of your life."

And Jesus says, "If you do that, I'll call you wise" (Mt. 7:24, paraphrased). "I'll call you great" (Mt. 5:19, paraphrased).

However, there's another kind of guy in the Body of Christ who doesn't go after this. Jesus calls him foolish (Mt. 7:26) and He calls him least (Mt. 5:19). I don't want to be foolish and least. I want to be wise and I want my commitment esteemed from God's point of view as great.

Amen. And so that is the overview of the chapter.