21 DAYS OF PRAYER FROM THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT THAT WILL TRANSFORM YOU FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

Robert Watson

21 Days of Prayer: Upside-Down Kingdom
Written by Robert Watson

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Scripture reference: Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New International Version.



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# Introduction

In terms of sheer impact, no speech has transformed the world more than the one given by Jesus on the mountainside. In fact, most great speeches are simply piggybacking on the thoughts and principles in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And it begins with some of the most shocking, upside-down statements ever made.

Jesus preached a new way of living so that we might learn to live as free citizens of this Kingdom wherever we are in the world. But to do so, we must be willing to unlearn, recalibrate, submit and prayerfully apply the teaching of his sermon.

As we take the truth of God, testified to brilliantly by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, and apply it to our relationships with God and with people, the result will be transformation. It will not be just the appearance of transformation on the outside, but true transformation from the inside out.

Over the next 21 days, let's pray through the most remarkable speech of all time together. And, while we are sure we will be left amazed, even more than that, we will be transformed. And, as we are transformed from the inside out, God can use all of us to continue turning the world upside down.

Better together,

Scott Ridout
*President, Converge*

# Day 1: Jesus Draws a Crowd

## Matthew 4:23-25

*[23]Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. [24]News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. [25]Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.*

Before Jesus preached the greatest sermon of all time, he gathered a crowd. He did so by pulling back the curtain just enough for us to catch a fleeting glimpse of an invisible, yet powerful Kingdom not of this world. This Kingdom exists beyond the limits of physical space and time. It is a Kingdom where all that is wrong is made right. The beauty of this Kingdom is that it can be experienced in the here and now, not just after we die.

Everywhere Jesus went in his few short years of ministry a collision went with him. It was a collision between the realities of his heavenly Kingdom and the brokenness of our fallen world. It is at this point of contact we see the sick healed, the dead rise, the demon-possessed set free, the lame walk, those shamed given a new identity, the blind receive sight, new wine when the wedding feast lacked. Most important, a new way of living is preached so that we might learn to live as free citizens of this Kingdom wherever we are in the world.

But there's a catch. To learn to experience this beautiful Kingdom built on a relationship with the Almighty King, we first must unlearn our most natural tendencies. The Kingdom of Jesus is an upside-down Kingdom where our natural compasses will not lead us. The power and beauty of Jesus' Kingdom that we glimpsed as he trekked across Galilee is just as real today. May we be willing to unlearn, recalibrate, submit and prayerfully apply the teachings of his sermon over these next few weeks.

## Prayer

Father, lead me on this journey of learning and applying. Reveal truth to me each day. Help me see what I can't see that is wrong in my thinking. I acknowledge your ways are higher than my ways. Your thoughts are higher than mine. I begin these weeks by acknowledging the power of your Kingdom and my desire to experience you and your Kingdom more deeply than I ever have before. I want to experience you not just when I stand face-to-face with you, but in the here and now. Lead me. My desire is to follow you. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# Day 2: The Beatitudes

## Matthew 5:1-11

*Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2and he began to teach them.*

*He said:*

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

What would you say is the greatest speech in all of history?

In modern times, the speeches likely to come to mind are Lincoln's Gettysburg address, Churchill's "Never Surrender" speech or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. It could be you think way outside the box and would credit Chris Pratt's "Teen Choice" awards or William Wallace's big- screen motivational speech to rally Scotland against the tyrannical King Longshanks. All were great speeches.

But in terms of sheer impact, no speech has transformed the world more than the one given by Jesus on the mountainside. In fact, most great speeches are simply piggybacking on the thoughts and principles in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And it begins with some of the most-shocking, upside-down statements: "the Beatitudes."

Look back over the highlighted words associated with "blessing." What? It's as if Jesus spilled water on his notes right before addressing the crowd. The Beatitudes are completely contrary to the thinking of the day. In the minds of the crowd, those who were blessed were the conquering, powerful, arrogant and indulgent looking down on the lower classes from their ivory towers. Yet, Jesus declares out of the gate to the crowd of misfits, you are blessed. Why? Because they are with Jesus, and the upside-down Kingdom is at hand. And, more important, they are postured to receive what Jesus is ushering in.

## Prayer

Father, search me. Reveal any area where I am relying on my own power, talent, position, performance or potential when I should be relying on you. Forgive my pride. Thank you that regardless of any of these things I might be tempted to rely on, I am completely blessed simply because you are with me. May I begin to understand more of that truth today. Be with me as I sit and as I rise, as I speak and as I listen. Keep me aware of your presence throughout the day and of the blessing that comes from knowing you are with me. I am blessed beyond imagination. Thank you. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# Day 3: Salt and Light

## Matthew 5:13-16

*13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

It was around 1 a.m. when I started to lose feeling in my arms and legs, followed by heart palpitations. We were in a remote facility deep in the woods of Honduras, miles from any form of civilization. I woke another pastor, who called the director of the orphanage where we were working. Within about 45 minutes, a small sedan arrived to transport me miles along what felt like endless dirt roads. Until arriving at a small block building marked with a cross. It was here I learned the value of salt.

When Jesus declared to the blessed misfits they were the salt of the earth, the significance was not lost on them. Salt then was so valuable, it was exchanged as currency. Roman soldiers were at times paid in salt, leading to the word "salary" and the phrase "they aren't worth their salt." Salt was used to preserve food. Without it, everything rotted. In a short simple statement, Jesus affirmed each person's value both in his Kingdom and in this world. Then he doubled down with light. At night, when roads were dangerous because of the weather, animals and criminals, cities were a place of refuge and safety.

When I arrived at the hospital, doctors explained that because of working in high humidity, I contracted a fever and consequent sickness. This led to severe salt depletion in my body. They hooked me up to a bag of saline (low percentage saltwater) and immediately I began to feel relief and life returning to my body.

You are valuable. As a fellow blessed misfit in the Kingdom, you and I preserve the world from decay and show the way to refuge and safety. But our effectiveness as salt and light requires our efforts.

## Prayer

Jesus, thank you for allowing me to be part of your mission in this world. You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, yet you have invited me to be an extension of you and your ministry. I can't think of any greater honor. Give me eyes to see relationships in which I can serve to prevent decay. Help me to shine your light in such a way that it isn't about me and my glory, but yours. May my good deeds cause somebody to glorify you today. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# Day 4: The Fulfillment of the Law

## Matthew 5:17-20

*17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."*

The Bible is the story of Jesus. Jesus wants to be clear with his audience that he is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. His reference to the Law and Prophets concerns the Old Testament as a whole. The Hebrew Bible is the TaNaK, the Torah (or Law), prophets and writings. Jesus is declaring he has come to fulfill what was written about him in the Scriptures. He explains this on the road to Emmaus: "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Lk. 24:26-27 ESV).

Once we see Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture, he then wants us to align our lives to it. Jesus' statements about the commandments take on a deeper meaning than just obeying rules or laws. Jesus says your righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees and teachers of the law were really "righteous" and lived according to the rules. Jesus gets to the heart of being a disciple—not just obeying commandments but taking on Jesus' righteousness and then being transformed by his love.

Jesus was able to accomplish for us what we could not do and live the life we could not live. His expectation for us is to know him and allow him to change us from the inside out. And we are to have a righteousness deeper than obeying a law but rooted in who we are in Christ. Jesus wants to change us and to live out his kingdom in the world today.

## Prayer

Jesus, help me to see you in Scripture. Help me to be able to show others who you are and what you have done for us. I pray I can allow you to change me from the inside out. I pray that I live not just outwardly in obedience to commandments to be a "good" person but am transformed by your righteousness imparted in me. Help me to see life and others as you do and to love you and others as genuinely and as deeply as you want me to. In your name, amen.

## Prayer Journal

# Day 5: Murder

## Matthew 5:21-26

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

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

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

The religious crowd in Jesus' day were all about appearances. You could literally see how everyone ranked religiously by how they dressed. And this mindset went far beyond fashion. Behaviors of fasting, giving, prayer, worship, etc., were all put on display in such a way to impress one another and solidify the spiritual hierarchy of the people.

Jesus took their religious system and hierarchies and repeatedly broke them down. God isn't concerned with appearances. Appearances are simply how we see one another. God is interested in our hearts, which is how he sees us.

In this teaching, Jesus gets to the heart of murder. The problem is not just the act of taking a life. The root is contempt within our hearts for another life. We might not commit the act of murder, but the seeds of murder have already begun to take root when we see another human being as "less than" we see ourselves. Then Jesus gets very practical. Before the seeds of bitterness or contempt ever have a chance to take root, reconcile with whomever it is you have fallen out with. And notice that Jesus isn't just talking about those who we are upset with. He gives examples of somebody who has something against you or is taking you to court. Paul reiterates this when he writes we are to live at peace with everybody as far as it depends on us, whether we have been wronged, or we have been the ones who have done wrong.

## Prayer

Father, is there anybody with whom I need to reconcile? Is there anybody I have seen as "less than?" Forgive me for the seeds of murder I have allowed to take root in my heart. Equipped with your forgiveness, your patience and your love, help me to extend that same grace to those I have fallen out with. Give me wisdom to know if there are any steps I need to take to make those relationships right. And give me the courage to take those steps. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# Day 6: Adultery

## Matthew 5:27-30

*27 "You have heard that it was said, 'you shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."*

I met my wife on a missions trip to Africa and by the time we were flying home, I was trying to convince her to fall in love with me. It took lots of convincing and much longer than the flight had to offer, but eventually she got there. I had lived with the misconception that once we were married, temptations to look lustfully at another woman would be greatly diminished, if not completely subdued. I was wrong. A couple of years into our marriage, I felt led by the Holy Spirit to confess my thought life to my wife. I knew it was from God because I thought it was a terrible idea and wanted nothing to do with it. My wife responded graciously, and through tears and time, we established healthier boundaries to protect my heart and mind from this lifelong temptation.

Like his teaching regarding murder, Jesus takes adultery beyond the surface to the root of the issue. The seed of lust takes root in the heart, leading to adultery. Rather than drawing the line at adultery, Jesus draws the line at ever planting the seed of lust to begin with.

His use of hyperbole comes across strong, exactly as it is intended. How many lives have been cast into ruin because lust took root and grew unchecked? How many marriages destroyed, families separated, witnesses discounted and individuals objectified? And how many have avoided the transforming love and grace of Jesus out of fear, guilt or shame of their sexual past or present? Jesus sees the wedge we create between relationships with others and with him when we let this seed take root. He loves us far too much to quietly sit by while we follow the same path as so many before us.

When, where or how are you tempted to fantasize about others? What boundaries do you need to establish to protect the relationships that matter most?

## Prayer

Father, you know my heart far better than I do. Search me and know me. Reveal any areas I have allowed to operate unchecked. Help me see the value of my relationships and the danger of a lustful path. I know you love me and speak so strongly on this topic because of that love. Help me to enjoy this life without the seeds of adultery that want to rob me of that joy. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# Day 7: Divorce

## Matthew 5:31-32

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

Divorce is not new. It has been around since antiquity and continues to be a part of life. It is a tough and sensitive issue, and how we deal with those who are experiencing or have experienced divorce matters. It is our responsibility to understand how Christ saw divorce and show both grace and truth just as he did.

Although God hates divorce and intended marriage to be permanent, he allowed it because of the hard-heartedness of the people. The laws regarding divorce protected the wife, who was most vulnerable (Deut. 24:1 and Exod. 21:10-11). These protections were far better than those of any other nation at that time. Although these laws called out sexual immorality and provisions for food, clothing and marital rights, by the time of Jesus the Hillelite group of pharisees had created an "any cause" divorce that allowed divorce for "any cause."

This is what Jesus is addressing both here and in Matthew 19. When confronted (Mt. 19), Jesus doesn't just answer the question. He gets to the heart of the matter first and emphasizes God's desire for marriage. Jesus always wants to get to the heart of an issue, to correct wrong understanding and to forgive and lift up people. In doing this, he shows both grace and truth. Just as with the woman at the well or the woman caught in adultery, Jesus can confront sin and then call to discipleship. Jesus was the master of grace and truth. We must constantly try and live out both concepts fully in our lives and to those we minister to. When faced with tough issues, specially like divorce, let's learn from Jesus and let him model the way for us.

## Prayer

Lord, help us live full of grace and truth. Help us to have a heart for what you want for us and to communicate that to others with love, truth and grace. Help us to imitate you and see how much you love those who need you. Help us to have hearts for people going through tough times in their lives, so that we can be light for them in dark times.
In Jesus' loving name we pray, amen.

## Prayer Journal

# **Day 8:** Oaths

## Matthew 5:33-37

*33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' 34 But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."*

As of today, what all do you own? If you were to make a quick inventory, what would be on that list? Shoes? Clothes? Phone? Maybe even a car or a home? Think about it again. Do you really own these things?

A friend unexpectedly passed away recently. He was relatively young and healthy, and his passing was a complete shock to everyone. At his memorial service, I listened to story after story of the kind of man he was. He was generous, he was genuine, and through his faith he is now forever with Jesus. But all his *stuff* remained right where he had left it. None of it went with him.

A pastor, mentor and friend of mine often reminds me, "What we think we own is really just on loan. Even our breath is borrowed. We are simply managers." To put it in biblical terms, naked we came into this world, naked we will leave. We came from dust, and we will return to dust. The whole universe is God's and everything in it, including you.

Jesus is brilliant at not just telling us *what* to do, but rather, how to *think*. Think like a steward. Manage well what belongs to the Owner. And what you can actually own is your integrity and character. Let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no.

## Prayer

Father, give me wisdom to discern all that belongs to you in this life. May I manage what you have entrusted me with in a way that honors you. Help me to own my integrity and character. Holy Spirit, reveal any area in which my life lacks integrity. Guide me in building a life that aligns with what I say and do in every area, even when you alone are watching. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# **Day 9:** Eye for Eye

## Matthew 5:38-42

*38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."*

Jesus is not weak. Some have mistaken his meekness for weakness, but that couldn't be further from the truth. The biblical definition of meek is not weak. It is power under control. When Jesus was facing arrest, Peter stepped in to defend him with the sword. At this moment, Jesus gives us a tiny hint of the power he wields with a word. He says to Peter, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"

To put this in perspective, 2 Kings 19:35 records an angel putting to death 185,000 Assyrians in one night. Multiply that number by 12 legions (12 x 6,000 = 72,000) and you get a grand total of 13.32 billion. Enough to wipe out earth's population at the time. Dozens of times.

Jesus is not weak, and neither are his followers. When Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek, hand over our coat or go the extra mile, the meaning is deeper than what it appears on the surface. Our tendency when facing adversity is to fight or flee. Jesus is the King of the third option. A slap on the right cheek (note he specifies which side) would be a backhand or an insult (not an assault). To turn the other cheek is neither to cower or to sucker punch, but to force the adversary to choose either the shameful route of assault or to back down. If someone sued you for your shirt, the premise being that they are suing unjustly, and you gave them your second and only layer (coat), that would leave you with precisely zero clothing.

Jesus doesn't run from the injustice or resort to physical violence He outwits it, placing the ownership on the true perpetrator. Lastly, a Roman soldier was permitted to make a Jewish citizen carry his pack up to a mile but no farther. To go the extra mile would put the soldier in the wrong, forcing him to plead to carry his own pack, humiliating himself and restoring one's dignity.

Jesus is not weak; he doesn't flee but he doesn't pick a fight, either. He finds the third option.

Where have you felt as if you only have two options (fight or flee) when perhaps there is a third?

## Prayer

Jesus, help me to see the third option in adversity. Give me patience to pause when I want to respond emotionally. When I cannot see the third option on my own, help me to seek wise counsel to see from a fresh perspective. Help me to be meek, just as you have modeled for me. May I keep the strength you have given me under control for the good of those around me and for your glory. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# **Day 10:** Love for Enemies

## Matthew 5:43-48

*43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Probably one of the most challenging things Jesus calls us to do is to love our enemies. However, this is the very thing God wants us to do, and it is the example he set for us. His plan for redemption meant unconditional love for all humanity.

Loving those who love you is easy! Jesus' question is poignant and a bit sarcastic, "Are not even the tax collectors doing that?!" And "Do not even pagans/gentiles do that?" Since their view of both gentiles and tax collectors was very low and since they were supposed to be the people of God, these questions cut straight to the heart of the matter. Aren't you better than a tax collector? Can't you rise above what the tax collectors do? Aren't you better than the gentiles? Can't you do more than they do?

Jesus' challenge to them, then, is to be perfect. Our English word "perfect" does not quite capture what Jesus is expressing with the word *teleios*. This word means "having attained the end or purpose, complete, perfect." In other words, become what you were made to be. What you are made to be is so much more than how you are behaving. Loving your enemy is the goal. Can you reach it?

## Prayer

Lord, as I seek to be more like you, help me to love my enemies. Help me to show this uncommon grace and make a big impact on the lives of those who hate me. Help me to love more and judge less and, in that, to be a light to those around me. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# Day 11: Giving to the Needy

## Matthew 6:1-4

*[1]"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. [2]So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. [3]But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4]so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*

Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, continuously challenges his hearers on the difference between outward religion and inward righteousness and what it truly means to live in his Kingdom now. He applies this challenge of Outward vs. Inward to several topics, and in this passage, it is "giving."

Although giving was always a part of the worship of Israel, it had become a way to show off their abundance and to boast about what they could give. Jesus' point here is to not be a showoff when it comes to giving. Others do not need to know what you give or how much you give. Giving is truly a heart matter, meant to worship and please God, and should be done without others knowing.

In a similar way in today's world, we can get so focused on a number or percent that we lose track of what God is really asking us to give. Not how much, but how we should give. In Mark 12:42-44, Jesus compares the giving of a widow's penny to that of a pharisee. He states that the pharisee, who gave much, gave out of his overflow or abundance. However, the widow gave out of her *BIOS*, or her livelihood. She literally gave what she needed to live on. True trust does not come in giving what we can spare, but in giving what will challenge our faith.

How are you giving? Are you focused on a percent, giving for show or giving to God in secret and out of your livelihood? Are you truly trusting God to provide for you and to bless you in ways that only you will know?

## Prayer

Lord, help me to give in a way that pleases you and you alone. Help me to give my life and resources for you and your Kingdom, and help me to grow in my faith through it. Help me not to seek to impress others but to seek to love you and to love others through what I do and give. Help me to be like the widow who gave all she had. She showed true trust and obedience and in that was truly blessed. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# Day 12: Prayer

## Matthew 6:5-15

*5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

*9 "This, then, is how you should pray:*

*"'Our Father in heaven,*
*hallowed be your name,*
*10 your kingdom come,*
*your will be done,*
*on earth as it is in heaven.*

*11 Give us today our daily bread.*

*12 And forgive us our debts,*
*as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*13 And lead us not into temptation,*
*but deliver us from the evil one.*

*14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

*15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*

Jesus continues to emphasize internal righteousness vs. external religion in terms of prayer. Again, true righteousness in Jesus' Kingdom is internal. Your relationship with God is something you work on privately and then express to others in your love and actions. Prayer is not meant to be made a show of, but to speak to your Father in heaven. You have a Father who knows you and what you need. He wants to spend time with you and reward you. Just as with giving, those who pray for show already have received their reward, the acknowledgment of others.

Prayer is also assumed. Jesus says "when you pray," not "if you pray." For Jesus, the question wasn't a matter of whether to pray or not to pray, but how to pray. Jesus then goes on to give us the greatest example of prayer, the Lord's Prayer. This prayer has been repeated daily by believers across the world since Jesus said it. And in it, he succinctly shows prayer is about God, praising him, aligning to his will and becoming more like him. It is succinct, deep and meaningful. Whether you repeat this prayer or just use it as an example of how to pray, it is a daily reminder of who God wants us to be. God wants us to focus on him and his will in this world, to ask for what we need, to accept and give forgiveness and to avoid temptation. How are you using this prayer in your life? Think about its words and what they mean for you. Pray through the Lord's Prayer with a new heart and new desire to worship your Father in heaven and align to his will and his work.

## Prayer

Lord, thank you for your example of prayer. Thank you for being a Father who loves us and knows what we need even before we ask. Help us to continually reflect on this prayer's words and seek your will for our lives as we spend time with you. Teach us to love and forgive others and be the people you want in this world. Amen

## Prayer Journal

# Day 13: Fasting

## Matthew 6:16-18

*16 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*

Jesus mentioned fasting in the same way as prayer. It is something internal, something between you and your Father in heaven. When fasting is done for show, the reward is other people's acknowledgment. But when it is done in secret, you will be rewarded by your heavenly Father. Fasting, like prayer, is also assumed. Not if, but when you fast. In today's world, fasting is trending. A lot of people I personally know practice intermittent fasting to stay in shape. It has been shown that some fasting is good for you physically. But Jesus was not just condoning fasting to start a new diet program. Fasting for Jesus was something greater.

Fasting for Jesus is a part of being in the Kingdom of God. To fast is to go without, so that you can focus on God and his provision for you in your life. It is also preparation. Jesus fasted during his wilderness trial. He knew his reliance and focus on the Father was what would get him through what lay ahead. How often do we think of fasting the way Jesus did? How often do we fast and rely on God for our lives and thank him for all we have?

## Prayer

Lord, thank you for teaching us to fast. Thank you for being our example as to why and how we should fast. Help us to fast not just because it's trendy, but because it helps us focus more on you. Help us to seek you for strength and guidance so that we can be better equipped to face the trials in our lives. In your name we pray. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# **Day 14:** Treasures in Heaven

## Matthew 6:19-24

*19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy,*
*and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,*
*where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*
*21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

*22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full*
*of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then*
*the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

*24 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you*
*will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God*
*and money."*

What are you working for in life?

We live in a society that puts value on the accumulation of things, retirement accounts, experiences, etc. And I know too many people who, aligned with this, are working to store up treasures on earth. People who seek only the increase of their accounts or the accumulation of things. In this passage, Jesus says having that kind of mentality is foolish. Everything we gather in this life will be destroyed and/or stolen. You can't take any of it with you when you die. Our pastor says, "you never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul!"

Jesus' point is that we are to focus on what really matters, what is eternal and not on what is temporal. We will focus on our treasure, and will either collect it here on earth or in heaven. Wherever you are collecting your treasure is where you will be focused and will determine how you live.

Jesus goes on to give two examples. First, the eye. When our eyes are healthy, we are full or light and can see clearly. But when they are bad, then all we see is darkness. Focusing our treasure on earth is like having bad eyes. You do not have clear sight. You are blind. The second illustration is of masters. One cannot serve two masters. You can only love and serve one. Then he ends by saying you cannot serve both God and money. In Greek, the word for money is *mamona*, which can refer to "wealth and earthly goods" or to the Syrian god of riches. Jesus may have meant both. To prioritize money, wealth and goods on earth over treasures in heaven is the same as worshiping a false god in hopes of attaining more earthly treasures.

## Prayer

Lord, in a world that values what we can gather here on earth, I pray you will help me to seek you. Help me know the treasure I seek is eternal and to align my life even more to love you and to love others. Help me see my success not in the things and money I have, but in how you use me for your Kingdom and to reach others.

## Prayer Journal

# Day 15: Do Not Worry

## Matthew 6:25-34

*25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*

*28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*

Anxiety in today's world is high. People spend a lot of money and time trying to curve their anxiety and find peace. Here, Jesus wants his people to have faith and trust our Father in heaven who is generous and gives us what we need. Jesus states that both birds and flowers are taken care of, live for the day and have beauty — they do not worry. Jesus wants us to learn from nature that just as God sustains birds and flowers, so he will also sustain us because we are more valued than those.

Jesus asks, "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" What a great question that gets straight to the point. In fact, as we worry, we use up our time and our life. We can spend so much time worrying and creating what could happen that we do not actually live or step out in faith.

Jesus emphasizes that our Father knows what we need. We need to see him and his Kingdom, and we will get what we need — not necessarily all we want, but what we need. Later, in Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Jesus wants us to trust in God and rest in him. Each day has enough to worry about. Jesus wants us to focus on today and on our heavenly Father and seek his Kingdom. By doing this, we can curve anxiety and rest in his love, provision and presence.

## Prayer

Lord, every day is full of things to worry about. I pray I can focus on you and give you my burdens. Help me to see your provision and care in all that is around me. And help me to know I am loved by you more than I can ever imagine. Help me to seek your Kingdom and righteousness and to know you have all I need today. Thank you for loving me and providing for me. In your sons loving name, Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# Day 16: Judging Others

## Matthew 7:1-6

*[1]"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. [2]For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

*[3]"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? [4]How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? [5]You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

*[6]"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."*

Recently, I heard a podcast on which someone was asked what the first verse of the Bible was that they memorized. The answer was "do not judge." He said he had learned that verse before he was even a Christian and used it to combat Christians who judged his life at the time. This represents a common misunderstanding of this passage. Most people think it's about not judging others in general. However, it states that you should not judge since you also will be judged in the same way. The problem is not helping others see the "speck" in their eye; the problem is we never deal with the "log" in our own eye. As a matter of fact, Jesus says in verse five that you should first remove the log from your eye. Then you can help with the speck.

Throughout this sermon, Jesus has been teaching about the difference between outward religion and acceptance by others vs. inward righteousness and focus on our Father. With his statement about judging, Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. When we judge others, we are focused on what is happening externally. We're focused on what others are doing or not doing and how that compares to what we are doing or not doing. God wants us to look at ourselves from the inside out: To be righteous internally and to seek and trust God, to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and, in so doing, to love others.

Jesus does not want his followers just to be more religious people, following laws and trying to look good before others. He is not asking for legalism, but too often this is where following him can lead. Jesus wants each of us to look inward, grow in his love and grace and then extend that love to others. Our outward work then does not become something for show or a standard to judge others by. It becomes a reflection of the unconditional love and grace Jesus has shown us.

## Prayer

Jesus, help me look inward to see what I need to change and how I need to grow. Show me how to experience your love, grace and forgiveness today. Help me change outwardly and not judge others, become legalistic or give for show. But help me to reflect your grace and love so that I can be a witness to them in my life and be a light to those around me. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# **Day 17:** Ask, Seek, Knock

## Matthew 7:7-12

*7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*9 "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! 12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."*

Jesus' very presence on this earth is testament to God's wanting us to know him. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. In this person, God has revealed himself in such a way that we can begin to understand and relate to his personality, feelings and will. But we play a role in how well we know him.

In this teaching, Jesus clearly communicates the power of pursuit. Ask, seek and knock, and the God of the universe will give, reveal and open the door. What an amazing promise! Luke expounds on verse 11 when he quotes Jesus: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (Lk. 11:13).

As if the person of Jesus weren't enough already for God to reveal himself, he gave us the Person of the Holy Spirit. He dwells within us, whispers to us, works through us and connects us by the depths of who we are to one another and to our Father. Our job is to ask, seek and knock for more.

## Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, fill me new with your presence. My understanding of you is a drop in the ocean and so I eagerly seek to know more of you. In this moment, I simply want to be with you and give you space to speak to me. (Pause. Give time for what God wants to speak or reveal to you in this moment). Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# **Day 18:** The Narrow and Wide Gates

## Matthew 7:13-14

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

The Bible teaches that humanity always has had a choice in our relationship with God. In the beginning, God gave Adam and Eve a choice and told them to enjoy all the trees in the garden, especially the tree of life, but to avoid the tree of good and evil. The choice was life or death. This call to choose life continues in Scripture. For example, Joshua and Moses call the people to choose life. God always has called his people to choose life. But we do not always listen.

Here, Jesus is rewording this idea of choice. He compares the wide and narrow gates. The wide gate is an easy path and one that most will choose. The narrow gate is much smaller and not many will choose it. But it leads to life. Jesus is calling people to enter through the narrow gate. Choose him, his way, his path, his Word and his salvation, which he alone brings.

What a sobering passage. Which gate will you choose? How will you live in such a way that you will help others choose the right gate?

## Prayer

Lord, we know the choice has always been there, choose life. You want us to know you and take refuge in you, but so many choose their own paths and are lost. Help us not only to choose the right path, but to help those around us choose it as well. Help us continue to shape our lives to reflect you and your love, mercy and grace so that we can be lights in this dark world. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# **Day 19:** True and False Prophets

## Matthew 7:15-20

*15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."*

Immediately after warning of the wide and narrow paths, Jesus gives a follow-up warning. "Watch out for false prophets." Just because something is spiritual or sounds spiritual, doesn't make it holy. The enemy masquerades as an angel of light. Deception is his native language, and he has been speaking it for millennia, making him quite good at it.

So, how can we discern carriers of truth and lies? Jesus immediately answers this question with a great litmus test: Look at the fruit. I have found this test useful in discerning truth in teachings as well as in teachers.

Paul gives a great pair of contrasting lists in his letter to the Galatians. One expresses the fruit of evil flesh, the other the fruit of the Spirit. "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:19-23a).

If you want to know the root, look at the fruit. With any teaching or teacher, what is being produced? If it is producing anything other than the fruit of the Spirit or, at worst, is producing the fruit of the flesh, beware!

## Prayer

Father, give me wisdom to discern truth from lies. Reveal in me any thought, belief or action that is rooted in a lie. If there are any false teachers or teachings I have grabbed hold of, help me to release their teaching and replace it with the Truth. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

# Day 20: True and False Disciples

## Matthew 7:21-23

*21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*

If you haven't noticed this theme yet in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, God is not impressed by outward appearances. In one of the most startling segments of his sermon, Jesus gets to the heart of our salvation. And the heart of salvation is God's grace delivered through faith in Jesus.

First, for any that have ever doubted Jesus' claim to be God, notice who Jesus says we will all stand before on the day of judgment. That's right, Jesus. On that day there will be two types of judgment for two categories of people. As John points out in Revelation, some will be judged by "books" in which their merit will be contrasted to God's standard, and all will be found wanting. The other group will be judged by a "book" (singular), referring to the Book of Life in which the names of those who put their faith in Jesus are recorded.

For those who choose to rely on their own merit (the books category), even the greatest of words are not enough to meet God's standard: words such as "Lord, Lord" and the greatest of actions such as prophesying, driving out demons or performing miracles. It is not what we say or do that saves us (that would be merit) but, rather, Who we are with. There is nothing wrong in declaring the words "Lord, Lord" or performing miracles. But these are nothing apart from the saving grace of Jesus.

Paul writes to the Romans, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved" (Rom. 10:9-10).

## Prayer

Father, thank you for the gift of salvation. Thank you for ordaining it, Jesus. Thank you for accomplishing it and, Holy Spirit, thank you for sealing it. Jesus, you are Lord. I submit myself to your leading. I believe you paid the debt of my sin on the cross and that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you were raised. Jesus, thank you for clothing me in your perfection, so that I might withstand judgment for all of my sin and enter into eternity with you. Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit and the promise that the same power that raised you will bring life to this mortal body. My gratitude for what you have done for me overflows. I love you. Amen.

## Prayer Journal

## **Day 21:** The Wise and Foolish Builders

### Matthew 7:24-29

*24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." 28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."*

The rain is coming.

For all of us, there will be days of trial, but the greatest torrent comes the day already appointed when all the things of this world are stripped from us, and we stand face to face with a Holy God. As Jesus continues his closing thoughts regarding that day of judgment, he draws a proverbial line in the sand before the crowd gathered along the Galilee hillside. Don't just hear these words of mine and nod your head in agreement. Apply them. Put them into practice. True faith is action-oriented.

As the greatest sermon ever preached ended, the crowd was amazed at Jesus' teaching. But being amazed is not the goal. The goal is to be transformed. James echoes this teaching when he writes, 22 "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (Jm. 1:22).

Transformation comes as a result of the right information applied in the context of our relationships.

Expressed in mathematical terms: Information + Application + Relationships = Transformation.

As we take the truth of God, testified to brilliantly by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, and apply it to our relationships with God and with people, the result will be transformation. It will not be just the appearance of transformation on the outside, but true transformation from the inside out.

### Prayer:

Holy Spirit, help me to stay in step with you as I apply what I know. May your fruit be evident in my personal life and my relationships. Jesus, I long for the day you will make all things new, including me. But until that day comes, help me to start the journey of transformation by living as a citizen of your Kingdom today. Help me to live out the principles of this new way of thinking, applying the truth of what seems at first to be upside down. I choose to walk this path in faith in you. In doing so, may I be a small part of making the ways of heaven a reality here on earth. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.



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