

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Scholars Day Conference

Virtual Scholars Day 2020

May 1st, 12:00 AM

The Sermon on the Mount: A Call to Obedience

Rylee Roberts

Ouachita Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/scholars_day_conference



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Roberts, Rylee, "The Sermon on the Mount: A Call to Obedience" (2020). *Scholars Day Conference*. 22.
https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/scholars_day_conference/2020/honors_theses/22

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholars Day Conference by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

“The Sermon on the Mount: A Call to Obedience”

written by

Rylee Roberts

and submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for completion of
the Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Rob Hewell, thesis director

Scott Duvall, second reader

Myra Houser, third reader

Dr. Barbara Pemberton, Honors Program director

4/27/2020

Thesis Final Draft

The Sermon on the Mount:
A Call to Obedience

Rylee Roberts

I recently went snorkeling in Hanauma Bay of the Hawaiian Island, Oahu. Coral reefs and big, brightly-colored fish fill the Bay. Without goggles, I could only float on top, unaware of the depth and beauty below. When I put them on, however, I could observe the life and beauty of the ecosystem for myself. I could dive under the surface and explore what I had not known was there. I could find firm places to plant my feet when I needed to stand. I have found studying Scripture to be a similar experience. Learning more about historical and particularly cultural contexts adds immense depth and understanding. I encourage you “put on your goggles” and come exploring.

I once did a Bible study on the Sermon on the Mount with a group of coworkers. Our leader and many of the girls seemed to have no idea what Jesus tries to communicate. I wanted to research history and culture and language and present the depth of Scripture and the exciting truths as well as convicting comments made by Jesus. Scholars have researched and evaluated the Sermon on the Mount in great depth. I wanted to put forth some of their knowledge in plain language so people like my Christian coworkers could read and understand more of what Jesus intended with His message.

We have to address what Jesus says because time does not nullify the truth or the commands set forth. Jesus wants His followers to obey Him in these ways and be characterized by certain qualities.

We must hear what He says, not what we hope He says. We see our lives transformed to follow Him, not His message transformed to fit

our schedules and lifestyles. I urge you to value God’s interests more than your own, trusting that your well-being is in God’s interests.

Matthew 4:19, 23-25

“‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people...’ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. 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. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.” (NIV)

Jesus changes us. His first instructions did not include knowledge gain or self-transformation. He calls us to follow Him so that He may transform us from the inside out. We do not have to figure it out on our own. We walk forward with palms open and up, going and doing as He transforms

“His words are so uncomfortable that even those of us who say we love Him and fight to defend Scripture’s authority find ourselves looking for ways around what He says.”

-Craig Keener, *Matthew*, 147

us. We have times of preparation and times of going before we feel prepared. Jesus calls His disciples to Him and then equips them.

Every new job starts with some level of instruction or orientation period. You have to learn the rules and expectations to serve as an effective member on your work team. In a way, the Sermon on the Mount serves as an orientation for the disciples. A few verses prior, these men had been called from their routines to commit their lives to a stranger. They needed to learn the principles of what it means to follow Jesus. Therefore, readers should interpret every instruction and example set forth in light of a leader instructing His followers. Those who heard Jesus teach learned how to better serve Him and represent Him in this world. Therefore, this guide has been prepared for those who consider themselves disciples of Christ (in other words, Christians). If you want to follow Christ, you must follow His Word. Although we live around 2000 years from the speaking of Matthew 5-7, the kingdom of God has yet to diminish or change. What Jesus speaks here reigns true over His followers today as much as in His day. The Bible left no room for future generations to decide we can pick which pieces of Jesus' instruction to follow. We proceed, therefore, prepared for whole-hearted obedience.

Beginnings

As Jesus began His ministry, He first acknowledged His purpose of unity with God through His baptism. He next acknowledged His intention to use people to reach more people by calling and training His disciples – especially the twelve apostles.

Reputation plays a critical role when starting a new business. Credibility plays a critical role when presenting information. Imagine you needed heart surgery. I am sure you would not choose a surgeon who had never been to medical school or had never performed surgery, even if he said he had the capabilities necessary to perform it. We select credible people to perform our most important operations. We follow people we trust, people who prove themselves.

Jesus spent the early parts of His ministry building His credibility and reputation. He called men to follow Him and revealed His power to them. Jesus' healing spree caught the attention of those who heard, and news of Him spread. The casting out of demons exhibited spiritual power in a context with more visible spiritual warfare. Medical miracles brought hope to a time with more mystery than healing. Imagine a person in your life who has cancer, one of today's most detrimental diagnoses. Imagine struggling with that person to the feet of Jesus. He places His hand on this person's shoulder and says, "Your faith has healed you." Imagine watching the strength and health return to your loved one after you thought you would lose them. This seemingly ordinary man without much of a reputation just cured an often-terminal illness. How do you respond to such a man? This time in Jesus' ministry played a pivotal role. He gained authority through His actions before presenting His disciples with a message which contrasted that of their religious leaders.

We must acknowledge the absurdity of the situation to the original audience if we want to step closer to faithfully grasping the impact of Jesus' message. Although Jesus had begun building a reputation, He had little status before most people. They knew Him as a nobody who stood up,

called out the teachers of the law for misrepresenting God's kingdom, and started teaching different things with authority, power and conviction.

Submission and Lordship

The success of being a disciple lies not in how well an individual can follow rules, but in how that individual regards Jesus. If we want to have fruitful, kingdom-lives, we must begin by nailing down our understanding of Jesus. If you do not respect Jesus and worship Him as God, you will not respect His words and strive to follow Him in obedience. One must believe in the authority Jesus set forth in His life and ministry for His words to hold their meaning in our lives. Without authority, Jesus is merely a different kind of righteous person with a new teaching and a harder set of rules.

So, who is Jesus? To name a few:

Healer (Lk. 5:12-17)	Crucified by Haters (Mt. 27:22-23)
Good Shepherd (Lk. 15:1-7)	Bled and Died (Mt. 27:33-39)
Hated by Man (Jn. 18:18)	Cornerstone (Eph. 4:19)
Divine (Lk. 8:26-31)	Savior (Jn. 4:42)
Friend (Jn. 15: 15)	Servant (Jn. 14:4-5)
Brother (Had siblings) (Mk. 6:3)	Son of God (Lk. 3:22)
Gives true rest (Mt. 11:28-30)	Tempted by Satan (Lk. 4)
Was without Sin (Lk. 4)	Came to take away/ atone for sin (Jn. 3:2-6)
The Messiah (Jn. 4:25-26)	He Loves Us (Jn. 15:9-17)
Creator/ Part in Creation (Gn. 1:27, Jn. 1:3)	Came as a Baby= Human (Lk. 1)
Born of a Virgin (Lk. 1)	Has always been (Jn. 1:1)
He's the Prophesied One (Jn. 1:45)	HE ROSE AGAIN (Jn. 20)
Calls Sinners to Repentance (Mt. 9:13; Jn. 10:16)	

Even non-Christian scholars and philosophers admire Jesus because He encourages people to be better and do good in the world. Christians must represent Jesus in a way that acknowledges His status as more than an admirable man and teacher. Jesus is the perfect Son of God who came to the earth to fulfill what we as imperfect humans never could. He came to begin the new covenant, call people to Himself, and die in the place we deserve. Jesus reconciles us to God. God sacrificed Him because of His vast love for us. Understanding this redemption story leads Christ-followers to offer themselves back to God and live a life of submission to Him. We walk in obedience to His commands in response to His love for us and because of our resulting love for Him.

Cultural Christianity

While this concept of obedient love should be straightforward and thrilling, American culture has thrown its own twists into the picture. Unfortunately, Cultural Christianity has taken root in many homes and hearts. By “Cultural Christianity” I mean to suggest the standards, pressures, and practices set forth by Christ-followers and church-goers in a particular context. Adopting Cultural Christianity leaves people with a burden of chasing acceptable church attendance or exceedingly “spiritual” worship instead of freeing them to pursue the Lord in whatever way He calls. These cultures are dangerous, for they fool uncommitted people into thinking they are saved, and they damage the reputation of God’s people in the unchurched community. The word “Christian” gets used by countless people to describe their religious affiliation because they have been to church, believe in God, or go to a school with a Protestant foundation. For some, the label “Christian” had been woven into their sense of identity without there ever being a personal commitment to Christ as both Savior and Lord. Highly saturated Christian cultures can fool people into adopting lifestyles and Biblical phrases without urging them into repentance. American churches and evangelical contexts, though believing they follow God’s command to share the Gospel, too often transform the Biblical message into something that sounds appealing to buy, like an accessory on an infomercial. Rather than an accessory to add to one’s life, serving Jesus requires sacrifice of one’s life. Jesus repeatedly makes it quite clear following Him will result in discomfort and even rejection. He also makes clear that those who persevere will receive reward. Eternal blessing after death will replace the persecution faced in this world. We must not fall prey to the pre-packaged Gospel that fits into the schedule and style of any life one might already have and miss the eternal celebration in God’s presence.

Jesus Himself says near the end of the Sermon that it is possible to perform miracles and exert power over demonic forces in His name yet still be eternally separated from Him. When we compare ourselves to each other instead of to the standards Jesus here sets, we can quickly alter our role and responsibility as ambassadors for Christ, our understanding of Christ, and how we portray Christ to the world. However, no matter what culture teaches or who we compare ourselves against, Biblical standards never change. It matters not how our lives compare to the lives of those around us. Only our obedience to Jesus’ expectations matter. Self-proclaimed Christians who do not believe and follow the Bible are no Christians at all, and they will arrive at heaven’s gate only to be turned away because they have deceived themselves. Do not allow yourself to become one of the fooled.

Obedience

Jesus makes clear in this passage the misconception the religious leaders had of God’s intention with the law. Some would describe Jesus’ words here as upside-down. In reality, however, the Kingdom of God sits right-side up. It is our sinful world that exists upside down. Jesus came to restore it, to fulfill the law, and to mediate. We view the world differently than Jesus because sin twists our picture of what is good. Jesus’ words felt radical to His disciples because they had been taught to think differently their whole lives. Like them, we have to come to an understanding that what Jesus sees as good may be foundationally different than what we perceive to be good.

Goodness characterizes the Kingdom of God, and we only experience a taste of that goodness during our time on Earth. We live in response to our understanding of the person and work of Christ. We cannot achieve perfect obedience, but we strive for it. Obeying God's Word becomes a *natural response* to His character, power, and display of love. The closer we move to the ultimate revelation and understanding of God, the harder and more unnatural it becomes to disobey. We become like God more each day in the hope of the full manifestation of His kingdom.

Obedience begins inside. Jesus does not set forth a list of rules or a new law for His disciples to try to perfectly emulate so they can look better than the Pharisees. He describes the heart of someone who has encountered God's goodness and experienced His love. He offers pictures of how such a person might behave as a result. Jesus' audience grew up learning of righteousness merited through obedience to law and animal sacrifice. Jesus' message of salvation through faith and repentance involved changing God's covenant with His people. Because of Jesus' perfect life and atoning death on the cross, anyone who places their faith in Him can receive salvation. Rather than obeying God out of necessity or obligation, we obey out of willful desire.

When you choose to follow Jesus, you cannot expect to have a transformed exterior with an unchanged interior. To live as though changing your actions and behaviors makes you a Christ-follower would be insanity. God changes the inside - the heart - and behavioral changes come as a result. Sometimes church members send the wrong message. Well-meaning Christ-followers tell new believers they need to be in church twice a week, join a small group, and read their Bible every day. While these activities certainly strengthen one's spiritual life, we must be wary of suggesting that failing to fit behavioral molds strips someone of their salvation.

Matthew 5

Imagine, you are sitting on the mountainside listening to Jesus: You follow the crowd to hear this new teacher that has risen up- "Jesus of Nazareth." You silently make your way to Him and sit in the grass. The soft blades tickle your feet as you wait to hear the man for yourself. Finally, He rises, and His gaze sweeps over the crowd gathered. Voices hush in eager anticipation of what He may say. His first statements surprise you. It feels as though Jesus can see your heart - like He speaks right to you: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." How did Jesus know that you are mourning? Burying your sister last week was the hardest thing you have ever had to face. Agony has wrecked your heart for many days, yet here Jesus says this is a blessed state because those who mourn get to experience the supernatural comfort and healing of God. You lean in to hear what He will say next because Jesus' message seems to include you. Something that once felt so far now feels so near. Jesus begins His sermon by making it all-inclusive. He invites those who society demeans to be a part of the kingdom of God.

The Beatitudes

5:1-2

“Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said:” (NIV)

Jesus is about to introduce the Kingdom of God. He explains throughout the following passage the expectations He has of a person who has submitted themselves to God’s ruling. We cannot accept Jesus as Savior without submitting to Him as Lord. He challenges how culture thinks of success and approval by blessing the opposite. As it goes on, the Greek text, particularly the use of plural pronouns, emphasizes Jesus’ expectation of communal living between His followers. The focus remains on characterizing the body of believers rather than creating a list of morals for the individual. These characteristics should encourage followers of Jesus to share triumphs and trials. Living in an individualistic Western society can alter the message we receive from Scripture. As you study, reflect upon these truths as addressed to Christ-followers as a whole, living our lives as a unit of believers seeking to follow God together.

5:3-6

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” (NIV)

The Sermon begins with a series of “Blessed are” statements called the Beatitudes. Jesus begins and ends with a present manifestation of blessing, but each statement in between promises a future blessing. In each scenario, Jesus takes a seemingly negative or inferior position and declares a presently blessed state because of the coming reward. In a world that desires instant gratification, choosing a future spiritual reward over a present, physically beneficial reward seems incredulous. Someone who sees they are poor in spirit, however, will know the riches of these promises.

Acknowledging spiritual bankruptcy begins the ability to find wealth in the love of God. Without admitting sin and seeking repentance, one remains far from the Lord and from the riches of His

“God approves those who relate to Him by admitting their spiritual poverty and mourning over sin and oppression, humbly seeking spiritual fulness. God approves those who relate to others mercifully and purely as peacemakers, even though they may be persecuted for their righteous behavior... Jesus is showing the error of superficial, self-centered living. His biblical realism establishes the values that lead to true bliss and ultimate comfort for His followers.”

- David Turner,
Matthew, 147

love. Entering a relationship with God means accepting sonship, becoming part of God's family, and receiving a part of His inheritance. In fact, admittance to and ownership of the kingdom of heaven is Jesus only presently active promise in the Beatitudes. When you admit your need for God and commit yourself to Him, God seals you with His Holy Spirit, immediately granting you a part in the present manifestation of His kingdom.

Acknowledging a poor spirit and being filled with the Holy Spirit leads to mourning sin. Those who mourn their sin receive comfort because God extends grace and forgiveness. They have comfort in their reconciliation to God.

Meekness, though it has the potential to be seen as an undesirable trait or even an insult, here receives praise from Jesus. Despite our personal gains and accomplishments, we inherit nothing, for nothing travels with us past this life. Even worse, seemingly self-obtained accomplishments can bring along with them arrogance, complacency, and comfort with what we can provide for ourselves. Such things impair our understanding of our need for Christ. American culture opposes meekness, instead valuing success and each individual's ability to make a name for

"Authentic meekness is an unassuming humility that rests in God and renounces self-effort to relieve one's oppression and to achieve one's desires."

-David Turner, *Matthew*, 151

himself. Taking a posture of meekness, we should allow God to work through us, knowing He can do more than we ever could of our own accord. We must accept the promise of a future reward, denying ourselves the instant yet inferior pleasures we could temporarily produce ourselves.

Everyone knows how it feels to hunger or thirst. What does it look

like to have that same desire for God and His Word? We work to earn money to provide food. We spend time cooking so we can enjoy flavorful meals. We use our resources going out to eat to indulge in the variety of foods and drinks that please us. We clean up after ourselves so we can do it again the next day. We snack throughout the day to supply constant enjoyment. We carry water bottles with us so we have access to what we need at any given moment. We refill our drinks when what we have had does not fully satisfy, and no matter how much or what we consume, we always go back to it because our bodies never stop needing food and drink. They never stop hungering or thirsting. Do we treat our need for God the same way? Do we give it the same time and resources? We should long for nothing as we do God.

Such a longing follows and evidences internal transformation. When you have acknowledged your sinfulness, repented, and submitted to the Lordship of Christ, your desires change. Hearts transform as we pursue the Lord. As we strive to better reflect Him, God's desires become our desires. Formerly having been enslaved to sin, we now freely chase the goodness of God, hungering and thirsting for it. Out of love for Him, we give our all to live an honorable life that represents a fraction of His righteousness.

If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, God will fill you. God wants us to desire Him with the same urgency as we do our daily needs, such as food and water. We need to recognize our daily need for God. God will meet you with Himself.

5:7-12

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (NIV)

Jesus’ inclusion of mercy pairs well with His later statement regarding judgment. When we pass judgment on others, we create a standard for God to hold us to. Showing mercy to others leaves room for the reception of mercy in return.

We live in a world where sin and evil run rampant. Sin should grieve us, but often we grieve only the obvious atrocities. We must come to flee all unrighteousness, internally and externally. God will not overlook a corrupted inside on the basis of a pious exterior.

“Wanting to see God is a symptom of purity.”
-Oswald Chambers

“...we often operate with the presumption that blessings are meant for our happiness. But Jesus didn’t see it that way at all; blessings are more important than that.”

-Rodney Reeves, 106

A pure heart comes only by the radical transformation brought through forgiveness because of Jesus Christ. If you know Jesus - that is, if you have a personal relationship with Him - you will indeed be reconciled to God for eternity. Therefore, the pure in heart will see God.

Peace-making relates to how we engage others. Under no circumstance does this endorse the practicing and preaching of a prosperity gospel to avoid conflict or persecution. Rather, we should be seekers of reconciliation. Heaven will be the ultimate manifestation of peace with a universal acceptance of God. Rejecting the gospel of peace may bring dissension between the sharer and the hearer, but we should still work to share God’s reconciliatory hope offered through Christ. God’s children will share His message.

Jesus offers blessing to those who seek righteousness amidst ridicule. Cultural Christianity lures us into expecting praise for our righteous behaviors and habits, but Jesus anticipates the opposite for His followers. Believers need to strive for righteousness together, encouraging one another to remain faithful to the Lord in the midst of persecution from those outside the Church. When persecution and judgment come from other believers, a problem arises. Competitive Christianity

arisen from arrogance is impure and not beneficial for encouragement and spurring one another on in pursuit of the Lord.

Notice how Jesus changes His structure in the last sentence. Instead of referring to “those,” He refers to “you,” implying that this blessing will occur for all disciples. You should expect persecution for following Jesus. Those who represented Jesus for hundreds of years before had also been persecuted. We now join in the line, carrying on what those before us have carried to us. Jesus calls us to rejoice despite persecution. God sees our faithfulness and does not forget. He will reward us.

Unlike what the Pharisees taught, blessing was a future hope, not health or prosperity earned through righteousness. Jesus’ blessings refer to a spiritual fullness, an incomparable joy because of what it meant to follow Christ and enter the Kingdom of God. He pairs the clear promise of future blessing and description of why righteousness is the right way with an explanation of the brutal reality of following Him: persecution, sacrifice, counter-cultural activity, etc. However, we can in some sense consider persecution and insult a measure of likeness to the Lord. Being set apart from the world shows the people of the world that you live for a higher purpose. As a representative, you open yourself for questions regarding the one for whom you live.

Salt and Light

5:13-16

“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. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (NIV)

Jesus addresses inward health and spirituality through His discussion on salt. Our internal condition affects our effectiveness as God’s representatives. We do not create glory for God. Salt works to amplify flavor. Christians do the same for God in this world. He does not need us to create a reputation for Him, prove His faithfulness, or orchestrate ways for Him to work. God is already faithful. He has established His identity since before mankind existed. He works whether we do or not. He chooses to use us to amplify the character He already has, to share with the world how He proves Himself in our lives daily. Therefore, we are the salt of the Earth. We preserve the testimony of His greatness.

Verse 13 suggests that salt could in fact lose its saltiness when contaminated. If we accidentally mixed our salt with dirt, we would not use it on our food anymore. If we live in unrepentant sin, we no longer glorify God with our lives. Consider how ridiculous it would seem to one day use our table salt and find it void of flavor. The same absurdity applies to the idea of a Christian who does nothing for the Lord.

Jesus then turns the focus outward. He calls Himself the Light of the World and then grants His followers the same title. He wants our lives on display. A transformed life so starkly contrasts

one lived for the self that it stands out like a city on a hill - a light that cannot be hidden. We help the world see Christ.

Light means exposure. Vulnerability frightens many hearts because we fear shame and rejection. However, sharing pieces of our past, or even current lives, that happened in the dark - bringing them into the light - allows God to use them for Kingdom purposes.

Light in light places stops being effective. Light in dark places significantly impacts the area. Think of how much light a single flashlight shines. If you use a flashlight during the day, it serves no purpose and does no good. If you use a flashlight at night, it become indispensable. We need the light to illuminate what we cannot see. Likewise, Christians must move past our Bible study groups to shine our lights in places where residents live unaware of the darkness until illumination appears. Living together in a secluded Christian environment prohibits us from accomplishing Jesus' mission.

Notice how Jesus does not command us to overtake governments and hold those outside the church to Biblical standards. He commands us to live in a way that they may desire follow our Lord. Coercion was never the instruction.

If salt is not salty, it ceases to be salt. If light goes out, it ceases to be light. With these metaphors Jesus makes it painstakingly clear that disciples are all-in and effective for God's kingdom or worth nothing. There is no lukewarm option, no line for an in-between Christ-follower. Light you cannot see does not exist. Salt without flavor or preservative abilities has no worth. The point: you cannot simply cease to be what you are. You are a disciple of Christ or you are not. Authentic disciples cannot stop being authentic disciples. Now, God certainly gives grace as we fail to reach perfection on Earth. He cares about the condition, intention, and commitment of our hearts.

Disciples must be disciples inside and outside. Inward change results in outward expression. Salt and Light go hand in hand to describe the life and witness of Jesus' followers.

The Fulfillment of the Law

5:17-20

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

Jesus came to accomplish the law's purpose. With that, he brings redefined instructions with the intention of describing how to emulate His character rather than merely copying His actions. If

God only wanted behavioral change, He could have used someone else in His redemption plan. Jesus' perfect life and substitutionary death change the meaning of His message.

Rather than embracing this Sermon as literal instructions to obey each detail of the law, we need to focus on how Jesus emphasizes His position. He comes not as an enemy that wishes to do away with God's legal system but as an advocate for righteous living, capturing God's intention for the law in the first place. God's law evidences His value for purity, and Jesus does not detract from the call to holy living. He corrects it.

There is a tendency – or at least a temptation - to consider God's law in the same manner we assign weight to civil law. Varying levels of disobedience to civil law result in varying punishments. Jesus claims even the smallest stroke incorporated into a law means no less than the greatest. A small stroke of law is still law, and breaking it will result in punishment. The church, at least in my experience, tends to highlight some sins or temptations as more detrimental than others. Talking about some sins more than others can cause confusion in growing Christians and certainly sends the wrong message to those outside the church. Sins such as drunkenness and homosexuality are exterior and therefore easier to see. The church takes action against these sins and regularly calls them out, though be it in an often-unhelpful fashion. Someone in the church known for being exceedingly selfish or a habitual liar, on the other hand, often comes up in church gossip (another problem altogether) but receives no call to accountability for his or her actions. Jesus made His followership an all-or-nothing commitment, and the church should consider accountability in the same way.

Teachers have a huge responsibility. People look to them for instruction and guidance because they dedicate their lives to studying Scripture for the purpose of informing others. When Jesus began teaching, He did not go to the leaders with His information from God. He told it straight to the people Himself - just another act of His authority.

We must consider it significant that Jesus calls great those who practice His commands. It matters not if one agrees by mouth alone. Someone can listen to Jesus' entire sermon and agree with the moral principles without believing in Christ as Savior and Lord. Verbal concurrence with Jesus' message matters when action evidences stated belief.

Jesus' final statement in this section clues the audience in to its sinful, depraved nature. With it surfaces an overwhelming acknowledgment of the need for Christ.

Pharisees are righteous by the law, and listeners would reach a conclusion of the impossibility of attaining that much obedience to the law. Acknowledging the near-impossibility reveals this passage's intent of overarching truths rather than a list of commands. The characteristics describe how a Kingdom person acts in a number of situations that were prominent issues.

I cannot help but wonder how the Pharisees felt hearing Jesus' message. Are they convicted or so rooted in their ways they feel defensive? Certainly, the latter proved true with the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus, but I wonder about any who altered what they had practiced their entire lives.

We must acknowledge our tampered view of the Pharisees. Because we know the big picture of their hypocrisy and opposition to Jesus, we think of them negatively. Imagine, though, that Jesus - a man you do not know - comes to your church and says from the pulpit, "Your pastor is missing the mark. He does not follow my Word how I intend for Him to. He sets a hypocritical example to you. If you want to go to heaven, you will have to be like me and do what I say instead." In a context where individuals did not have personal Bibles to study, religious leaders were their only source of studying God's Word and therefore received high regard. Imagine the absurdity of Jesus discrediting the most devout person you know. If members of the crowd believe in the words of Jesus about a changing covenant and a need for adjusted teaching, Jesus then becomes the best source for new information. When we turn the tables, we realize we are more like the Pharisees than we like to admit. How would you feel if a stranger taught you different theology than your pastor and then called your pastor a hypocrite?

Choosing to Follow

Bibles often split these preceding with different headers, but the message is entirely cohesive. Jesus begins by describing counter-cultural blessings and including everyone in the salvation message. All people can join God's Kingdom. He clearly states joining will not be an easy task while on Earth. He then declares you have to be all-in. You either do follow Him with everything in you or you are not a Christian. When we sin, God's Spirit convicts us. When we repent, God extends grace. We see the need for grace because Jesus goes on to describe the level of righteousness necessary to enter the Kingdom of God. He leaves no room for us to decide we can make it on our own. We need Jesus for the journey. It takes more than the law.

When we choose to follow Christ, we accept Him as Savior and Lord. We cannot choose to "use" Jesus to get out of hell. We must commit to serving Him as our Lord. He therefore assumes the right to guide our behaviors and morals. We sign over that privilege when we bow ourselves before the Lord and submit to His ways. We can read the Bible and go to church and believe Jesus' words, but failing to act proves us as lost as someone who has never heard the Gospel.

Murder Internalized

5:21-26

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny." (NIV)

Here Jesus begins His series of commands that essentially say, “Flee! Do not push the boundaries. This can lead to sin.” In another sense, He’s stripping the pride of His listeners. One can easily say about himself that he will never murder, but everyone experiences anger. Including anger now puts the righteous people like the Pharisees on the same playing field as criminals and the immoral. In the beginning, Jesus knelt to include the sinful and meek. Now Jesus stands to knock the pious to their knees.

As He approaches specific teachings, Jesus refers to traditional teachings as passed on by the religious leaders. Some statements have a literal, Old testament basis, but others had been altered. Jesus clarifies the law’s intent. After seeing how easily we sin in our hearts and minds, we come to a greater understanding of the significance of Jesus’ perfect fulfillment of the law.

Jesus encompasses the furious attitudes and harmful words brought on by feelings of anger. Bitterness and grudges also have a role to play here. Leaving those seeds in our minds transfers them to our hearts which breed anger. Anger sends thoughts to our minds which breed actions, and suddenly we are capable of far more than we anticipated.

As a One on the Enneagram, I am driven by anger. This surprises most of my friends because I am a pleasant, amiable person for the most part. However, I struggle with harboring frustration, and I so often catch myself in conversations where I say things I know I do not need to. Frustration leads me to mistreat people, use hurtful words, and lose control of my emotions. Even when I did not intend to be angry, I end up “raging” (most often internally, for as a Nine wing, I also highly value peace). Jesus instructs us on treating the internal sin too.

Jesus, with the instruction of reconciliation at the altar, bypasses legal ritual for the sake of reconciled relationships. He suggests that to be right with God, we must be right with the body of God. Peace with one another matters to Jesus, and He suggests the urgency of finding reconciliation.

The instruction also evidences His focus on how we show love to others. In both scenarios mentioned, Jesus speaks to the culprit. He urges us, when we have wronged someone, to quickly seek peace so they would no longer have a reason to have feelings of anger toward us. By removing a situation where anger could take root, we help keep our brothers and sisters from being subject to related judgment.

Adultery Internalized

5:27-28

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (NIV)

God warned against coveting in the Ten Commandments, and here Jesus ties lust around to the same commandment. Purity must be present from the root. Our intentions and motives cause us to sin, too. Intentions also highlight the individuality of sin. While it takes two to commit adultery, it only takes one to lust. The person lusting will be held accountable for the act, not the

person being lusted after. Lust is not a matter of the actions or dress of another, but of the state and intent of one's own heart. Christians have the added responsibility of dressing and behaving in a way so as not to tempt our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we are not held responsible for the action of someone else.

Jesus increases personal responsibility with this instruction. One does not have to commit a sexual act to be considered an adulterer. God knows our thoughts and our desires. We must have emotional integrity as well as physical purity. Lust hurts the Lord's heart because we take His people and dehumanize them for selfish purposes. We lose the value of the soul when we lust after the body. Increasing our love and respect for one another should decrease our desire to treat each other like property or possessions.

Fleeing Temptation

5:29-30

“If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” (NIV)

Jesus offers radical remedies for fleeing temptation. He wants His followers to be willing to give up even what means the most to them if it means becoming more like Christ and fleeing evil. To the crowds, Jesus' arguments swung from reasonable to drastically unreasonable. He used vivid, extreme examples to drive home *values* so His people would be empowered to make kingdom decisions. He delicately juxtaposes the absurdity of not listening to Him with the spiritually radical message that clearly surpassed the expectations of what His listeners had learned growing up.

Eyes sit at the root of adultery. The children's song “Oh be Careful little eye what you see” shares immense wisdom. Jealousy and discontentment often come from knowing what others have and comparing it to what you do or do not have. If you cannot see without wanting, do not look. However, we do not need to consider Jesus' words here literally. Someone can lust even if they cannot see.

Through the power of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit enables us to say no to every temptation every time. When we choose to lust, or to participate in any sin, we knowingly grant ourselves permission to deny God's Lordship over that part of our lives. We decide that the blood of Christ is not enough for us to resist what sits under our noses. It means willfully denying Christ instead of dying to ourselves to follow Christ.

What are you willing to sacrifice to flee from sin? What are you willing to deny yourself for the sake of your relationship with God? Sin is serious, yet we play with it like playdough, trying to make it less threatening or less offensive. We must take sin as seriously as Jesus does. We should treat sin like it separates us from eternity with God.

Divorce

5:31-32

“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (NIV)

Divorce in Jesus’ culture meant degrading a woman to someone unable to care for herself. One point present here encourages people to have a soft heart toward their spouse. Treat people with dignity. Your actions have repercussions on other people when it regards marriage relationships. This also reveals how seriously God takes sexual intimacy. When two people get married, God sees them as bound together, a singular unit, not to be separated.

Oaths

5:33-37

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

The Lord will hold you accountable for each word you say. He remembers. He hears. He cares. Your tongue bears witness to His name. We must, therefore, also be careful the kinds of things we verbally support and the people we give witness to. A disciple of Christ should be so characterized by integrity that an oath would not be necessary.

Jesus also says we have nothing to swear by anyway. We do not own or control anything considered important enough to validate trust. Living honestly and vulnerably removes a need for someone to receive an oath or contract from you. As you have heard it said, say what you mean and mean what you say.

Retribution

5:38-42

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

Max Lucado has a story called “Punchanello.” The gist of the story is this: people’s opinions do not define who you are unless you let them. When we leave vengeance for the Lord, we communicate our security in our relationship with God to those who have wronged us. We place honoring the Lord above whatever human value we may receive through acts of retribution to

save our pride and make a name for ourselves. By allowing someone to do us wrong and offering to let them push it past the legal limit, we place them in a position where their opinions cease to have any power over us and who we are.

We are not bound by the law. We do not have to follow exactly as it says in cases of retribution. By refusing to cause harm to those who have hurt us, we testify to our submission to a power higher and greater than ourselves. Disciples should not bow to the ethical or moral standards of a culture. A fallen world may not determine acceptable behavior. Jesus here calls disciples to live above the law – and much of this stems from a love for people. In times of power, remember how it feels to be oppressed and refuse to become an oppressor.

If we refuse to let go of the “eye for an eye” approach to revenge, we should examine how our lives would change if God required us to take the same approach with Him. For every good thing He did for us, we would be required to serve Him up to that, paying back His goodness. This exercise would quickly reveal our deep need for Jesus. Every single inhalation requires retribution, for God controls the air and our bodies and can make them do as He pleases. We receive something from God in every moment, so every moment provides us with something to bless others with.

Choosing kindness over retaliation allows someone to take something from you and gives them something they do not deserve. Godliness in such situations should prevail over personal gain. We shall not aid Satan in encompassing the world with more evil and hateful action.

Love for Enemies

Every preceding principle in this sermon deals with problems that evidence a lack of love for someone. Jesus concludes this section, then, with the root of each problem - love. Love your enemies because Jesus loved us while we were His enemies. Love will empower us to obedience and action. It will distinguish us from the world.

For example, lust devalues and disrespects others with the intention of serving ourselves. Loving people as our brothers and sisters in Christ or as the lost sheep of the Lord changes not only our attitudes toward them, but also our behaviors. Love for Christ empowers us to act in His ways. Love for others strengthens our resolve against temptations to do them wrong. Our love for others expresses our love for God. It says, “God, because you love this person, I am going to fight to honor and love them too.” The more power we give to love, the more love will win the fight. The more we give in to temptation, the weaker our resolve becomes.

5:43-48

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

Have you ever tested Jesus' command to pray? In obedience, pray for those who irritate you. Without fail, praying for people who rub me the wrong way, frustrate me, or have hurt me in some way changes my attitude toward them. God lays a new perspective for that person on my heart or reveals one to me through a conversation with someone. I once worked with an immature young man who often improperly conducted tasks and set the rest of our team behind. One of my coworkers approached me one day and shared that she had been talking with him as he asked spiritual questions. She enlightened me to the fact I had been expecting him to act under the expectations of a spiritual worker instead of someone who had not yet made a profession for Christ. Most of my co-workers had assumed the same thing because of the nature of the job. Instead of frustration, I could then look at him in compassion and pray that God would reveal Himself to my co-worker.

Love for enemies sets us apart. Love for loved ones does not signify to the world our higher calling to represent Christ. Everyone loves their loved ones. To characterize the love of Christ, we must love those we have bad blood with. It takes humility to spend your time and energy giving of yourself for those who you do not like. Jesus loved in this way.

Jesus then drops a subtle bomb: Be perfect. God is perfect, and perfection cannot be attained apart from Him. Seeking Him is how we become like Him. The more He sanctifies us, the more our hearts align with His heart. We must love like He loves, not settling for the imperfect standards our world accepts.

Matthew 6 Guide:

Everything we do, we learned how to do. Walking. Driving a car. Solving a math problem. Playing piano. Handling conflict. Scrubbing the toilet. We learn everything we do. Jesus' audience has learned what it looks like to honor God through the law from their religious leaders. In the following passage, He comes before His disciples to re-teach what they had learned. He changes the motivation which is evidenced by the action. He also gives these instructions with the phrase "When you." Jesus assumes a believer will follow through in these spiritual disciplines, leaving no room for optional action.

Evaluate: What are you learning? Are you learning how to be a disciple?

Giving to the Needy

6:1-4

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your

“Giving to the needy in order to receive publicity is not giving at all – it is paying for human approval, and it forfeits divine approval.”

-David Turner, *Matthew*, 181

right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (NIV)

Though we may try to function stealthily and convince those around us we are doing good, God knows better. Acting to receive human attention immediately pulls you out of the running for divine recognition. God reserves such approval for spiritual acts done in secret. We can only receive out of one place.

Anonymity leaves more room for the Lord to receive praise, for the title of Giver moves from the individual to the one who inspired him. Rather than, “Wow, Amy is so kind to pass on this car to our family,” it remains solely, “Wow, praise God for using someone to bless us with this vehicle. He provides.” Radical generosity often characterizes spiritual transformation. We acknowledge what we have belongs to the Lord anyway, and we give what we have received.

“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.”
-Hebrews 6:10 (NIV)

Prayer

6:5-6

“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.” (NIV)

Re-evaluate why you pray and who you pray to. Praying aloud for others to hear – meaning, to sound eloquent to them and receive their praises - eliminates the reward from God concerning your request and righteousness.

I have heard people use prayer – and honestly, have at times myself used prayer – in improper ways. A pastor will close his sermon with a prayer that goes over his sermon points. (“And Father please help this congregation remember how to be holy, healthy, and happy by spending time in your Word.) Some use prayer to try to convict or guilt those listening. (“God, I pray over those who are giving the devil a foothold by not attending Sunday night church.”) Someone may use prayer to communicate something passive-aggressively or pseudo-spiritually. (“God, I ask that you convict Emma of the unkind way she treats us. Show her how to approach reconciliation and forgiveness.”) We must focus our hearts and intentions within prayer on the Lord.

The promise accompanying proper prayer encourages the heart of every believer. People all over this world serve God with their lives, put their safety and health at risk to share His message, disciple groups of students, and so much more. We each only know a fraction of the work being done for God. Most people will never know the things you do for the Kingdom. We can celebrate that God sees and blesses us by allowing us to have a place in His redemptive story. When you give up hours of sleep to lead students at a discipleship event, miss a special

celebration to be there for someone who needs you, clean up the mess you did not make so it will not fall to someone else, or any number of sacrifices big and small – remember who sees all things and will not forget what you have done to serve Him.

6:7-15

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (NIV)

Pagans in Jesus’ day babbled long and loud to capture the attention of their far-away gods who could not listen to all everyone at once. Christ-followers do not have to participate in the same fight or exercise manipulative oration. God hears us all at the same time, on our own, and responds. Praying as Jesus commands evidences to others what you believe about your God. It shows His omniscience and omnipotence. It declares His faithfulness and provision.

Jesus begins His example prayer with a recognition of God’s character. He has reason to be praised. He cries out from an intimate relationship. Prayer is a conversation between a father and his child. The opening statement addresses what the longings of a believer’s heart should be. It puts God’s desires first. It evidences a relationship where one has died to himself to make God first in everything he asks and desires.

The one who prays this prayer has an obvious recognition of his need for God. We need God to provide for our physical needs. We need Him to cleanse us spiritually. We need Him to be our strength. This prayer acknowledges God’s leadership and dominion. It willingly takes control over daily life and puts it back into the hands of God (as if it ever left). This prayer identifies the one praying as a person of God’s Kingdom. Each phrase has meaning and interwoven values taught by Jesus.

Jesus ties to the end a rule of equal forgiveness. How can we expect to receive what we are unwilling to give? If anyone could choose a substantiated right to withhold forgiveness, it would be God. Because He chooses to forgive, we must choose to forgive.

Fasting

6:16-18

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

Culturally, spiritual disciplines called by religious leaders meant everyone followed them. Choosing not to participate could be seen as questioning or defying the religious authority. In some ways, spiritual leaders put people in similar situations or make them feel like they are in this position. When the pastor makes a comment like, “I would hope all of God’s people in this church will come to hear our new financial plan tonight,” more than the usual Sunday-night crowd shows up. Not coming seems like an insult to the respect you have for you pastor if not an act of defiance. Guilting people quickly generates cultural-Christians, believers who resent church attendance, and legalistic judges.

I wonder what kinds of activities Jesus would call out today: “When you sign up to lead a life group...” or “When you volunteer to serve on Saturday morning...” Serving God’s people and participating in the active body of Christ needs to have a place in our lives, but our intentions for participation must focus on serving God and obeying Him rather than keeping up our Christian image.

Secrecy

Chapter Six up to this point talks frequently about doing things in secret. It seems evident that Jesus cares more about the intentions of our hearts than the actions themselves. He gives a standard that contradicts the religious leaders and calls out their impurity. He internalizes faith, moving it from an exterior religion of duties and allegiance to an interior relationship of submission and love.

Jesus’ does not mean to suggest we live our entire spiritual lives in a secret. Just last chapter He described His followers as lights on a hill. Such a picture emphasizes the point of being seen by unbelievers. When it comes to discussing spirituality with fellow believers, we must be careful in our approach. People can recognize and celebrate God’s movement, but the focus must never swing to bringing ourselves praise. We must be wary of deceiving ourselves into believing we have a close walk with God - or a walk with Him at all, for that matter, just because we carry out practices discussed in this passage.

In addition to caring only about God’s approval, we must also choose not to care about the opinions of others. At my undergrad University, someone wrote on the wall of a study cell I worked in, “You cannot do the will of God when you are controlled by the emotions of other people.” Seeking approval from people paralyzes us when it comes to pursuing God’s counter-cultural commandments.

We must also acknowledge that “secret” does not equate with pure. We might pray to God from our closets and fast without telling anyone but do so with impure intentions before God.

Your spiritual identity lies not in what church members think about you. If Grandma Jane is upset because you chose to play softball instead of coming to her Bible study, it means nothing so long as you are impacting the girls on you team for the Kingdom. Find liberation in this truth.

Comparison

I grew up in a small, private Christian school. A guy in my class sought to speak about the Lord in each area of learning. He loved Jesus, and no one questioned it. He did not “over-spiritualize” things or proclaim any kind of self-righteousness. Jesus was just irremovable from this guy’s core. However, my classmates would roll their eyes or reprimand him for thinking through a situation with a Scriptural lens all the time. What led to these actions? I do not know the answer, but I itch to wonder if it has to do with comparison. We have to abandon insecurity. If hearing how God uses someone else to minister irritates us, the resulting condemning behavior probably comes from a conviction of our own disobedience. Sharing God’s work through each person should be a way believers encourage one other and sharpen one another to be exceptional, effective kingdom workers. We can and should edify one another, pushing each other to be more like God without creating an ungodly competitiveness.

If you feel competition or comparison, consider an internal analysis of whether you are being obedient and open to seeing God use you. When we ridicule each other’s spirituality because of a bad place in our heart, we encourage other Christians to stop taking their faith seriously. The church should not persecute its members for living a life undeniably characterized by obedience to God.

Bad intentions and poor motivations cause us to act without concern for what is going on in our hearts, and then we embody hypocrisy. God calls us to walk in accordance with Scripture and pray without ceasing so we stay in tune with the Him as His desires become our desires. It is thrilling to imagine the ways God could choose to use us. He may want to use you to provide a blessing. He may want to use you to share truth. Do not limit God’s power. Run away from the temptation to belittle what He may wish to do with you.

Freedom

At the summer camp I worked at, we spent time each orientation talking about the power of doing things outside of our comfort zone. Leadership termed this concept, “dumping out your cool cup.” The director encouraged each of us to let go of what we think would be considered “cool” culturally or add to our reputation. We found acting with a full cool cup made you a lame summer camp counselor. On the contrast, being unafraid to do wild, whacky things or participate in potentially embarrassing challenges empowered campers to approach their experiences the same way and opened up the door for more relationships and gospel-conversations. Dumping out our cool-cup in church liberates us to holistic worship of God, unashamedly bringing Christ into every conversation, outspoken care for people and the challenges they are walking through, and so much more. It can authenticate our worship and change the focus of our hearts.

Treasures in Heaven

6:19-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where

moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (NIV)

It may seem like we use money to prevent worry or insecurity, yet concern with money only adds to our worry. We think controlling something we cannot control gives us more control over our uncontrollable destinies. Live simply, satisfied by what you need.

Evaluate your treasures. We can build treasures in heaven, and that means nothing physical. We can, and often do, treasure physical possessions, but God provides far more to treasure. Treasure people, relationships, and righteousness. Treasuring righteousness builds up our treasures in heaven because we come to look more like God.

We cannot take any physical items with us to heaven. Souls of those around us are the only things on Earth that make it to heaven with us. We should find our treasure in reaching people with the gospel. If we recognize the eternal value of each person and acknowledge that Jesus died for them as much as He died for us, how could we fail to treasure each person?

Filter

6:22-24

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (NIV)

Verse 23 in Greek says, “If your eye is evil, your whole body will be filled with darkness.” Some middle-eastern and tribal religions have an evil force called the “evil eye.” The evil eye brings destruction. Jealousy brings it on. If a Christian’s “light” is the Holy Spirit, then the “spirit” within someone with the evil eye is evidently a spirit of darkness. Having your eyes clear is imperative for living a Kingdom life. How can one accurately seek God with bad eyes?

Eyes light up life. Take the image of eyes and treasures together. Materialistically, when we begin to cling to what we have, we begin to squint. We limit our vision and struggle to see the

treasures - often non-physical - God has blessed us with. Wealth hinders our practical understanding of our need for God. Dare to wonder how your spiritual life, love for God, and dependence on Him might expand with the release of a compulsive hold on money.

Jesus’ commands “add up to a scathing denunciation of callous materialism and a call to reckless generosity arising out of a fundamental detachment from concern for worldly property.”
-George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 234

Do Not Worry

6:25-34

“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? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”
(NIV)

At some point we have to acknowledge the limitations of our understanding brought to us by our culture. The way we interact with the world will, to some extent, impact the way we interpret

Scripture. Pieces of the Sermon on the Mount make scholars squirmy. In a few places, we are caught between evidencing our stated beliefs and fear of offending people.

When friends and family deal with anxiety, we who do not feel the same way may offer the comment, “Just don’t worry about it.” While this poses an insensitive way to speak with our peers, Jesus gives essentially the same message. Jesus wants us to trust that His love for us exceeds His care for the rest of creation, yet He cares for it. We should trust that the God who spoke the universe into being, parted the Red Sea, cast out demons, and defeated death is powerful enough to handle our situations.

Birds work hard, but they take things one day at a time. God cares for them and meets their needs. Be more aware of God’s love for you and His faithfulness than of the burdens of your current situation. What kind of witness does worry send to those outside the church? With a world full of idols competing for our attention, someone who sees you living a life that says, “I don’t trust my God to take care of me,” will likely turn to something with more promise of fulfillment.

This should be every Christian’s favorite passage about life. We are given the clear way to experience the joy and fullness of life offered to those who follow Christ. God provides for the

“If one cannot serve God and money, then one cannot be anxious for the material things that money can buy.”

-David Turner, *Matthew*, 198

needs of those who pursue Him and His desires first. If we believe God is all-powerful, then we believe He can provide for any need that may arise in this life. We waste our time worrying about how things will go or what we may need. In some ways, worry communicates to God a lack of trust in His character. When we serve God, we accept what He gives us, acknowledging nothing belongs to us anyways own anyway. This frees us from worrying about material things, for serving money leaves us questioning what will or will not be provided. To some extent, saying, “Do not worry,” is another way of saying, “Stop trying to have control.”

Jesus did not look at the sick and say, “Stop being sick.” He healed them. Here he looks at the worried and says, “Stop worrying.” Clinical anxiety that results from chemical imbalances is something we now can identify and treat with medication or counseling. I do not think Jesus was referring to such anxiety. He wishes to remind His followers that He watches over them and knows their needs. They can let go of unnecessary stress because God controls their situations and has empowered them to do so.

We can acknowledge concerns, and we should bring them before the Lord. In fact, Jesus commands us to make our supplications known before the Lord – but we should leave them there. We should not pick them back up and carry them with us, allowing worry to rule our minds. Praying about a heavy situation can produce powerful results, but sitting and thinking of worst-case scenarios does nothing to help or change the situation. Jesus wants us to walk away from that behavior.

We should spend time acknowledging the goodness of God and His past and present actions. Praise Him for His future manifestation of Himself. Do not worry. Worship more. Worshipping more increasingly points our minds toward the Lord and reminds us of His faithfulness and work in the world. Do not suppress your concerns, pretending all is well, but when you are in a state of worry, worship instead. Vocalize God’s faithfulness and grace and love so you become more compelled to focus on His present goodness.

You are too important to be consumed with concern. God wants to use you and needs you to be an effective, faithful ambassador. Allow Him to use you through your concerning situations rather than succumbing to the concern, unable to move. No simple cure exists. Some people can simply flip a switch and let things go. Other practice prayer-journaling, pouring out their hearts before God in a written form. Some read the Psalms and find solace in David’s honesty. Find what you need to surrender.

Pairing this passage on worry with the earlier statements about prayer emphasize God’s provision. Jesus commands us not to worry about needs and tomorrow. He would not give contradictory instruction to confuse His followers. This is His third emphasis on needing to trust God to provide. If we pray about everything we might possibly need some day, we will spend our time asking for things we may never need and lose the ability to watch God anticipate our needs and provide for them through His faithfulness. Walk with God day by day.

Matthew 7

Judging Others

“When Christians dismiss other people’s ways of doing things, not only do they marginalize their tastes in music or whatever it happens to be, but they are sending out signals to the people who like these other approaches to life, implying that they themselves are simplistic, lacking in depth, inadequate, and so on – and therefore, by implication, if they are in the church they will need to be controlled, improved, and otherwise worked upon by those who are in charge.”

-John Drane,
McDonaldization of the Church, 197

Chapter seven deals largely with relating to others.

7:1-5

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” (NIV)

One problem lies with judgment of those outside of the church. Christians have standards to which we hold one another, but we cannot hold those outside of the church to those standards. If someone does not believe in the Word of God as his ultimate authority and has not submitted himself to it, he can go on living in whatever manner he wishes. He will live a life that leads him to eternal separation from God, but we cannot expect such a person to follow Biblical guidelines for life.

Subtle judgment poses a second issue. Failing to accept, befriend, or extend an invitation to someone outside of the church can indicate an unwillingness to associate with those who disagree with you theologically. Such behavior communicates to unbelievers a haughty attitude and a reign of judgment. We shall not exclude those outside of our spiritual circles or we miss entirely the point of the great commission.

I cannot read Jesus’ mind, but Jesus’ instruction here makes me feel as though He watches out for me. Jesus wants me to be aware that unfair or unattainable

standards I use on other people will also be used against me. He offers me perspective and encourages graciousness. It takes little effort to judge someone. It requires much stronger and developed character to give mercy. We deserve judgment from the Lord, but He will show us mercy. We must offer the same.

Take for example agreeing to meet someone for dinner. You arrive five minutes early, a practice you find kind and fair. When your date arrives ten minutes past your scheduled meeting time, you find yourself feeling short and irritated. They apologize, claiming their grandmother had called for the first time since arriving home from the hospital earlier that week stressing the importance they feel of being available for her. You feel a little less agitated, but a bad taste in your mouth remains. The next week, you arrive fifteen minutes late to a meeting. Your partner clearly feels frustrated with you arriving late, but you blow it off, claiming you had been in a good conversation with a co-worker and did not want to rush off. On this side of the story, you understand the full picture and offer yourself much grace. We must remember to be slow to pass judgment in all situations - especially when we only see the piece that involves frustrating us. Our time, relationships, job, etc., have no more importance than those of the other party. We must extend the grace we reward ourselves to others as well.

Sinful judgment often occurs silently. We do not wake up hoping to condemn people, yet we judge: through criticism, "sharing truth," offering unwanted help or advice. Where do we find our authority to judge others when we make harsh comments and criticisms? If we think a believer acts out of line with Scripture, do we have Scripture to back up our thoughts? What if what we think Scripture says turns out to be mere opinion, passed down to us by Sunday school teachers or peers who interpreted Scripture a particular way?

The Fall semester of my junior year in college, I studied abroad in Morocco. For the first time in my life, people who believed drastically differently than me surrounded me. In fact, Muslims think my belief in Jesus as the Son of God separates me from God instead of reconciling me to Him. As I lived among people who were unfamiliar with me and my faith, I had to consider my personal convictions and whether they had roots in Scripture. I did not want to paint a false version of Christianity for them. My friends would ask me things like, "Why do you not drink? Why do you not use curse words? Why do you not think these things are funny?" Discussing faith and working through Scripture to defend convictions (or discover that they were actually only opinions) proved beneficial for my spiritual growth and provided depth of conversation about Christianity with many Moroccan Muslims.

Do we use judgment as a way to try to control people? How often do our upset feelings regarding someone's action arise out of a frustration that our desires go unmet, our methodologies unused? We must throw out judgment that seeks to manipulate. Manipulation destroys honesty and a relationship's potential for fullness. It limits the freedom of the other person and makes them less than themselves. Reflect: Can people say no to you? When we phrase our desires as questions, asking before offering advice or making suggestions, we show others honor and respect. When we demand or manipulate, we demean and belittle people.

Drawing near to someone in gentleness brings about transformation far more often than harsh words or judgment. God's overwhelming grace, love, and kindness lead us to a place of repentance. Why not take the same approach with one another? I once heard a pastor say, "A nagging wife never changed her husband." Rather than highlight someone's incompetency or imperfections, approach issues with genuine, biblical concern. Say, "I am not judging you. I love

you, so I want to talk about what I am observing in your life. Is that okay?” Accountability differs from judgment, and Jesus left room for us to call one another to higher living.

We need to approach ourselves with a healthy balance of grace and accountability as well. We often judge ourselves more than we judge anyone else and more than anyone else judges us. We might criticize ourselves worst, speaking to ourselves in an ungodly way. Just as we treat others well, we must treat ourselves properly. We belong to the Lord. We should not tear down His temple.

Witness to the Lost

7:6

“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.” (NIV)

In other words, do not shove the gospel message into the ears of someone who opposes. Dogs, filthy animals in Jesus’ context, do not know the difference between the holy and the unholy. Someone unstirred by the Holy Spirit will not accept the gospel message. God calls us to share, not force. We end up damaging someone’s receptivity to the Gospel when we try to force acceptance.

While it feels disappointing to be told to leave alone those unprepared to accept the gospel, Jesus did the same thing. When rejected, He moved on to another town and shared the truth with those who might accept it. He knew His limited days, and He knew others could come after Him and share again. The kingdom expands over time. We like fast, exciting results and often want the kingdom of God to explode. However, God plants, waters, and cultivates to harvest. He plants small seeds and grows them into great, rooted, sustainable, fruit-bearing trees.

“...Insensitive evangelism often proves harmful not only to the obdurate whose heart is hardened by the undifferentiating evangelist, but harmful also to the gospel that is force-fed...”

-Frederick Bruner, *Christbook*, 275-76

We never give up all hope on seeing someone come to know the Lord. Though we move on after repeated rejection, we continue praying for God to move, working in their hearts and opening doors for them to hear the gospel again. It may take someone hearing the gospel twelve times over 40 years before they respond. It takes others two minutes to acknowledge their need for salvation. Both stories evidence God’s work and require ongoing cultivation.

Ask, Seek, Knock

7:7-12

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a

stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (NIV)

Asking does not guarantee receiving. Change your ask. Instead of telling God what you need and what you need help doing, ask Him what you need and what He wants you to do. Opening yourself up to Him allows room for change and growth and discipline. Asking, seeking, and knocking acknowledges before God our dependence on Him.

God is good. We do not typically think of ourselves as evil, but in comparison to the goodness of God, evil suits us well. If we trust ourselves enough to do “good” things, take care of ourselves, and meet needs, how much more then should we trust God to do the same?

Jesus never denies the necessity of or comfort brought by material possessions. He emphasizes God’s value of us and desires to see us exhibit faith in God’s character. We want to desire what God desires, but we forget that our idea of “good” often differs from God’s. We must remember our limited mindset.

Jesus’ “Golden Rule” addresses the heart of all He has instructed thus far: Do you want your spouse lusting after someone else even if they are not sleeping with said person? Do you want someone questioning your character so strongly they need additional affirmation to feel confident you will follow through? Do you hope the world will never be able to tell you apart from someone who does not follow Jesus? Do you want to be equated with a religious oppressor? Do you want your life to be consumed with fear over things you cannot control anyway? Do you want others to expect perfection from you? Be for other believers what you hope they will be for you. Live in an honorable way toward others. Acknowledge the Lord’s expectations of you and follow His standards, not your culture’s.

The Narrow and Wide Gates

7:13-14

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (NIV)

“‘Finding’ the gateway to life pictures discipleship as an active search for the kingdom, the opposite of the passive complacency that takes the easy way.”

-David Turner, *Matthew*, 215

No one likes hearing the words, “You’re doing it wrong.” No matter, we cannot fear offending people. Jesus spoke clearly and truthfully. Jesus said, “Sell everything and follow me.” Following Jesus requires personal desires to take a back seat. Jesus fearlessly proclaimed His message. He cared about eternity. He saw their souls. Are we willing to sacrifice a bit of social tension for the sake of the salvation of souls? Help others find the narrow road.

True and False Prophets

7:15-20

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.” (NIV)

Teachers may appear the same, but their lives will evidence the truth of their messages. Discernment asks the question: What is the root of that fruit? Having a Christian community brings an opportunity for people of God to discern your fruit, hold you accountable, and uproot sinful behavior. Healing hurts. You have to want it and wait for it. You cannot go on claiming to be God’s tree but produce evil fruit.

Just as fruit identifies one believer to another, it also signifies our alliance to God to unbelievers. Therefore, remain aware. Some of our fruits hurt our witness. For example, even talking to our friends in church, passing notes, and other distracted behaviors communicate to others we do not care enough about our faith to take it seriously. Why, then, would they?

True and False Disciples

7:21-23

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (NIV)

“Unbelievers know when their friends who claim to be Christian don’t actually take their faith seriously. It is detrimental to the mission of God in a community when unbelievers see little distinction between themselves and friends who are associated with church.”

-Dean Inserra, *The Unserved Christian*, 79

Jesus talks about miracles as a warning. We cannot trust them as a measure of righteousness because God says you can perform miracles in His name and still be sent away from Him in eternity. He knows the real you. Some people deceive themselves. People you work with or sit next to in church profess Christ as Lord yet do not know Him in a saving relationship. Perhaps someone you look up to or have learned from spiritually walks the road to condemnation. We must have honest conversations of what it means to follow Jesus not to rate ourselves as Christians and condemn those who have low scores, but to ensure our eternity will be spent worshipping the One we claim to follow in our days on Earth.

A preacher at the Camp I worked at shared an illustration with us one night. Honestly, I cannot remember which pastor said it, but the point of the message stuck. If you asked Satan, he would tell you he believes that Jesus is the Son of God. He believes Jesus died on a cross for the forgiveness of mankind. He memorizes Scripture and knows God's omnipotence. He shows up to church and pretends to be nice to people.

He misses the submission to God out of love and recognition of a fallen state. We cannot afford to deceive ourselves into thinking we imitate Jesus when in reality we look more like Satan. It does not matter who we fool on Earth because no one will fool God.

"Do we have the courage to communicate Jesus' message as clearly as He meant it to be conveyed, to warn ourselves and others that it is possible for people to assume they are saved and yet be damned?"

-Craig Keener, *Matthew*, 163

"...we know that Jesus will not be fooled, even if the rest of us pretend to be."

-Dean Inserra, *The Unsaved Christian*, 19

Eternal grievance will occur if we deceive ourselves. What a greater grievance if we chip away from Christianity so our friends find the mold they like and we tell them it is acceptable when Scripture makes it clear it will lead them to condemnation. Then we have

deceived them into thinking they are preparing for eternity with God when in reality they have yet to encounter Jesus.

At summer camp, we had a speaker every year who would put on a big production for the kids as his sermon. The staff felt divided over loving the kids-service structure and finding it confusing and distracting from the point of the gospel. The kids seemed to love it, but more kids each of his weeks also seemed to respond to a message they did not understand. One of my co-workers said about this speaker, "It's people like him that make people like me think I was saved when I wasn't." His brutal honesty shocked me, but it aided my understanding of the way numerous American pastors and speakers share the gospel message. They want to make responding to God an easy task anyone can do in the dark without embarrassment or accountability. I saw more kids raise their hands to acknowledge a need for Christ when all heads were bowed and the lights were low than I saw kids stand in their places with all eyes on them to acknowledge in front of everyone they had found Jesus. I believe authentically encountering Jesus - not just hearing about Him - results in an inability to keep quiet. If someone refuses to stand among peers at church camp and admit they need Jesus, how will they stand anywhere else?

Maybe you are afraid to boldly stand up and start following Jesus. Maybe you are the person who has grown up in church so everyone assumes you walk with God. If you know you do not, making a bold move might create nerves regarding embarrassment. I have heard such words from students at church camp. Those who truly follow God will celebrate you choosing to

authentically walk with Him no matter what they already think of you. Nothing will be more embarrassing than being cast from God's presence.

The Wise and Foolish Builders

7:24-27

“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (NIV)

Hearing counts as nothing when not followed up by obedience to His commands. Some people will hear the Gospel and choose not to respond.

The storm in this illustration represents the judgment at the last day. When you get there, you might still have a house. A house built on sand is still a house. The works and the looks are still there. What's missing is a foundation of godliness and a pursuit of His righteousness for His glory in obedience to His command. A house without a foundation shelters from rain but gets swept away in the flood. Do not get comfortable. External righteousness falls short of the authentic righteousness produced by a transformed heart.

Life comes through following Jesus, and death results in choosing not to follow Him. Jesus leaves no room for confusion. He did not care if someone took offense to His message. He knew the truth and shared it with His disciples so some might choose Him. Our care for people means nothing if we do not care enough to share soul-saving truth.

The Close

7:28-8:1

“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. (NIV)

Large crowds followed Jesus after the sermon. He did not withhold. He identified what it meant to follow Him, and He got an honest response. How often do we Westerners try to make following Him easy or comfortable? It requires a risky, sold-out response. We need to be more concerned with the authentic response of someone's heart than we are about the number of people walking the aisle at church camp. Nothing could be more evil of us than to give someone false assurance of their salvation.

We become our own worst enemies when we deceive ourselves, convincing ourselves that mediocre commitment to God is what He's looking for or worse - that our lukewarm commitment is devotion.

Nothing about God has changed. The idea that God thinks differently than us is not new. The messages He gave to the prophets were rejected. Towns often considered prophets heretical or absurd.

After we choose to follow the Lord, we must continue to grow. I love the Scriptural picture of these spiritual seeds for Christ followers to plant and water while God does the growing work. We tend to abandon the picture when someone commits themselves to the Lord! Blooming flowers still have to be watered and kept or they will die.

I once received as a gift a beautiful rose bush. When I received it, many flowers decorated the plant. However, when I failed to supply it with deeper soil, it quickly began to die. The blossoms withered and drooped. Only when it was replanted and given some light and water did it begin to grow again. Christians must be watered and given spiritual cultivation. No matter where you are in the growth process, seek those who can pour into you and those you can cultivate as well. We as the body need one another.

Your life evidences what you believe. What does yours say? If you do not live like you believe Jesus' teachings are true, why would anyone listen to you say you do and come to believe Jesus themselves?

Hell differs from prison. Society's "bad people" go to prison. Some of society's "good people" go to hell. God's good means spiritual transformation, not nice old ladies who buy donuts for first graders. Without Jesus, she will end up in hell.

The summer before my senior year in college, I worked at a church camp leading a group of high schoolers in leadership development and discipleship. Part of the program involved staff training, and a huge part of being on staff is the ability to converse with campers about the gospel. My counterpart and I noticed early on that one of our girls simply would not engage with campers. She failed to speak with them, sit with them, or report positive feedback about her time with them. She also rarely contributed to our conversations during lesson time. One day, we decided to talk with her through the Gospel, for maybe she was unsure how to articulate it. What the conversation revealed was that she loved church camp, raved about evangelists and worship bands, and was familiar with Bible stories, but she did not understand the Gospel. She had sacrificed half of her summer to come serve others and study Scripture, but she had not personally surrendered to the Lord. By the riches of God's grace, we saw this girl come to profess Jesus as Lord and surrender her life to Him. She knew about Jesus, but she did not know Him. She came to us lost, but she left a sister-in-Christ. She had to get lost to be found.

It is possible to grow up in church and still miss the message of Christ. I have seen multiple times the church choosing Sunday School teachers or small group leaders because someone has

"I had thought hell was for really bad people who committed crimes like murder, not for someone like me."

-Dean Inserra, *The Unsaved Christian*, 28

rich involvement in the church. We must acknowledge that church investment does not equal spiritual development.

Do not write passes for people. Be willing to have an uncomfortable conversation for the sake of eternity rather than assuming people are right with God because of something they said or did once upon a time and being left wondering after they pass if you will ever see them in eternity.

Choose

Good and bad, light and dark, true and false, wide and narrow. Jesus gives numerous opposing sets of words to lead to a final conclusion- a choice must be made. Follow Jesus or do not. You cannot sit in the middle or pick some parts and leave others out. Jesus knows you personally and leads your heart or you maintain control and lead yourself to death and eternal separation from God. We cannot lead ourselves to God. A choice must be made.

To those in the church professing to be Christians but living an ungodly life: Either stop professing Jesus or start living for Him. You take the Lord's name in vain when you call yourself a Christian (lit: little Christ) and do not follow His ways. This is not a judgment over professing believers but a call to accountability. An ambassador represents those who sent him. Likewise, we are ambassadors for Christ. We must obey Him to accurately represent Him. Dear brother or sister, we as your church family have a biblical right and responsibility to speak up against you. How you live cannot stand contrary to what you claim to believe.

I call to you out of a love for our Lord and beg you to be as He has called you to be. Obey Him. The Church is powerful, so let us act powerfully. If God calls for an upheaval in your live, so let it be.