

Matthew 5

Bible Study

By Gary Eugene Howell



Verses 1-2

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:1-2.

Observation: Jesus ascends a hillside, taking a position above the crowd where everyone could see and hear him, then sits down and begins teaching them.

Jesus wants people to know about God and is willing to take the time to teach them. The fact that he sits down to teach shows that he is not passive, but is personally invested in people's lives.

Discussion: How many of you have heard someone say any of the following?

- God is far off
- God started the clock and just lets it run
- God set the world into motion and then left
- God is a watchmaker, not a caretaker
- God watches but does not intervene
- God moved on

What do you think about these ideas? How do the verses we've just read compare with them? What might these verses show us about God's desire to be known and involved in our lives?

Verse 3

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:3.

Observation: This is referring to those who are humble. It's not referring to people who are financially disadvantaged. Matthew chapter 23 states that:

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.
(Matthew 23:12)

Faith begins with humility. Salvation is a gift to those who have faith. Thus, what Jesus means by saying those "poor in spirit" is, blessed are the humble for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Discussion: How does the idea of humbleness conflict with our culture of independence and self-reliance?

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Verse 4

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:4.

Observation: This is speaking of repentance. Those who mourn over their sins and sinful behavior will be forgiven, and in being forgiven, they will be comforted.

Discussion: When a man was in his twenties, he partied and drank and often got drunk at the parties he attended. Then when he was in his late 40s, he was a sober family man. Yet when he reflected on his twenties, he did so with fond memories and often thought to himself, “Those were fun times.”

What does this man’s attitude reveal about his view of sin and repentance?

Can someone truly repent if they still look back on sin as being cherished memories?

How might true mourning over sin change the way we remember or speak about our past?

What would it look like for this man to reflect on his past in a way that honors God and demonstrates true repentance?

Verse 5

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:5.

Observation: “They will inherit the Earth” is an end times prophecy. Meekness is like that of humbleness.

Foreground: *The author of this Bible study holds the belief that the church will be raptured prior to the tribulation. Those who survive the tribulation; the meek who put their faith in Jesus Christ during this time and are not killed by the Antichrist; will enter the Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ. They will inherit the earth because they will be the only ones left alive after Christ’s return.*

Study leader: Read the following verses out loud to your group. (if you are uncomfortable reading out loud, ask for a volunteer to flip to these verses and read them aloud)

Then all the survivors from the nations that came against Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of Hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (Zechariah 14:16)

No longer will a nursing infant live but a few days, or an old man fail to live out his years. For the youth will die at a hundred years, and he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

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No longer will they build houses for others to inhabit, nor plant for others to eat. For as is the lifetime of a tree, so will be the days of My people, and my chosen ones will fully enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labor in vain or bear children doomed to disaster; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD—they and their descendants with them. (Isaiah 65:20-23)

The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat; the calf and young lion and fatling will be together, and a little child will lead them. The cow will graze with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play by the cobra's den, and the toddler will reach into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the sea is full of water. (Isaiah 11:6–9)

He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (Micah 4:3)

Discussion:

What does it look like to cultivate meekness in today's world? How does meekness differ from weakness, and why is that distinction important for Christians today?

If your study group has difficulty with that question, here is the answer: Weakness means lacking the ability to respond or act; while meekness, on the other hand, means having the ability, but choosing to respond with humility, patience, and gentleness for the sake of righteousness.

Verse 6

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:6.

Observation: Have you ever had someone question your religious beliefs with an antagonistic or insincere tone? Or have you ever had someone ask you about the Bible because they genuinely wanted to know the answer?

Discussion: How is hungering and thirsting for righteousness different from simply wanting to be a “good person”?

Verse 7

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:7.

Discussion: Why do you think showing mercy is so important to God? What can make it difficult to show mercy to others?

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Verse 8

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:8.

Observation: The implication herein is that if one's heart is not pure; they will not see God. In Matthew chapter fifteen Jesus states,

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander. These are what defile a man...” (Matthew 15:19-20a)

What does it mean to have a “pure heart”? How does this differ from simply following religious rules or being a good person?

Verse 9

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:9.

Observation: When we talk about peacemakers, we might immediately think of someone who prevents war. “Peace in our time” was a declaration by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain when he incorrectly believed that he himself had prevented World War II, after his meeting with Adolf Hitler.

But the absence of war is not the correct interpretation here because of what Jesus said in Matthew chapter ten.

Do not assume that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (Matthew 10:34)

However, when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, they experience internal peace, even in the midst of war. So then who are the peacemakers? They would be those who bring the good news of the gospel.

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices, together they shout for joy. For every eye will see when the LORD returns to Zion. (Isaiah 52:7-8)

Discussion: How does the message of the gospel and the infilling of the Holy Spirit bring peace into people's lives? How does it create peace between God and people?

Study leader, read aloud (or ask a volunteer to read) - Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (Romans 5:1)

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Verses 10-12

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:10-12.

Observation: Here in the United States, for the most part, we have freedom of religion, but don't assume that by being a Christian, everything in life will go your way. As a Christian believer who tells other people about the good news of Jesus Christ, you will have people who insult you or falsely say evil things about you.

But we can't be shy about the gospel or the name of the one who has given us eternal life. Paul writes in Romans chapter one,

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Greek." (Romans 1:16)

Discussion: For those in the group who have recently shared their faith with another person, ask if they would be willing to tell a bit of that story. How did it happen and what was the outcome?

If there are none, continue with the following: There are cultural norms in America, that if you violate those norms, it doesn't matter whether you're talking about Jesus or the weather outside, you'll nearly always receive a negative response from people. In America, we were raised not to talk to strangers. So you can't just march up to a total stranger and yell "Hey you; you're gonna burn in hell without Jesus!"

However, if two strangers share a common circumstance, such as both of you are walking your dogs on the same street, then it is within cultural norms to say hello and start a conversation with that person regarding the circumstance you both have in common, (i.e. dogs), and then it's possible that you could steer that conversation into the topic of faith.

Verses 13-16

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:13-16.

Observation: You are the light of the world. Jesus doesn't say "become a light" or "try to shine"; he states that your identity in Christ is a light to the world. This echoes John 8:12, where Jesus says He is the light of the world. Now, his followers reflect his light to the world, much like the moon reflects sunlight.

Discussion: How does understanding that our light comes from Jesus change the way we approach sharing our faith?

What are some things we do which might hide our light, and what should we do about them?

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How might our role as “light” influence the way we treat people in public? For example, should we flip off a driver who honks at us in traffic? Imagine how awkward it would be if that same person visited your church the following Sunday and recognized you there. This speaks volumes about living out your Christianity outside of church.

Verses 17-18

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:17-18.

Observation: on its surface, it sounds very much like the law is still in effect. However, there is danger in not taking the whole of God’s word into account. Some Christians will argue, “Just read what the Bible plainly says!” But we can not read one or two verses as a standalone statement, claim “The Bible plainly says...” and then promptly misinterpret its meaning.

In verses 17-18, Jesus is rebutting the accusations of the Pharisees that he was a law breaker.

By taking the whole of God’s word into consideration, we can recall the verse in Hebrews that says, “By speaking of a new covenant, He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear”. (Hebrews 8:13)

The phrase “the law and the prophets” refers to the entirety of the Old Testament, not just the law of Moses. Jesus said he did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them.

Recall what happened on the road to Emmaus. “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained to them what was written in all the Scriptures about Himself.” (Luke 24:27)

Discussion: Why are we no longer under the law? Why are we now free to eat foods like lobster or wear clothing made from two kinds of fabrics, but are not free to murder and steal?

Hint: Give your study group, ample time to contemplate their responses. But if they struggle, here is the answer: The Mosaic law consists of ceremonial and ritual practices of sacrifices, dietary laws, clean and unclean regulations, festivals, and priestly rules. Under the New Covenant in Christ, these ceremonial laws are fulfilled in Him. That’s why Christians today are not required to avoid lobster, pork, or wearing blended fabrics. We are no longer under the law. But we are still commanded to love God and love our neighbors. In the example above, murder and theft, are examples of hating both neighbor and God.

Verses 19-20

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:19-20.

Observation: These two verses are a continuation of the previous two, and are an uninterrupted point which Jesus is making. Jesus is condemning the Pharisees by stating that it is not He who is

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the lawbreaker. Rather it is the Pharisees who break the commandments and teach others to do the same.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You traverse land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

(Matthew 23:15)

Discussion: God judges the heart. Discuss the differences between worshiping God from the heart through faith, vs, going through the motions of performing religious actions. Can a person in your own congregation go through the motions and actions of a typical Sunday service without having anything in their heart that is honoring God? Why do you think outward religious actions can mask a person's lack of genuine faith?

Verses 21-22

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:21-22.

Observation: God's standards are much stricter than ours. The reason is that God is able to judge the heart. We can only judge by what actually takes place. If someone commits a crime we can investigate and determine who did it. In a courtroom, a jury can look at the facts of the case and then declare the suspect either guilty or not guilty. God, however, doesn't need evidence or forensics. He doesn't need to investigate or to interview witnesses. Even if a certain person did not commit a crime, but had wanted to, God knows the intent in their heart and thus, they are still guilty.

Discussion: Every sin that has ever been committed began with a thought. How can we recognize when our thoughts are turning sinful, and what steps can we take to remove them before those thoughts grow into actions?

Hints: For though we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh. The weapons of our warfare are not the weapons of the flesh. Instead, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every presumption set up against the knowledge of God; and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Note: "make your paths straight" does not refer to success. Rather it refers to holiness and righteousness. A crooked path would be someone who lives a lifestyle of sin.

Verses 23-24

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Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:23-24.

Observation: These verses immediately follow Jesus's teaching on anger and are a continuation of that same topic. If you have wronged a fellow believer, or otherwise have some unresolved conflict between yourself and another believer, God wants you to first be reconciled, before bringing a gift to the altar. Jesus is saying that reconciliation is the higher priority.

Discussion: How does this teaching challenge our human nature? As Christ followers, what steps can we take to seek reconciliation when we've wronged someone?

Verses 25-26

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:25-26.

Observation: In the previous two verses Jesus spoke about having something against a brother (i.e. a fellow believer, perhaps someone who attends the same church as you). An adversary, however, could be defined, in this context, as someone who opposes or fights against you in a conflict, dispute, or argument. This goes beyond simply having a disagreement with a friend at church. This is more inline with someone being an enemy, and indeed, in just twelve more verses Jesus is going to talk about loving our enemies.

Discussion: The Bible says that pride goes before destruction. Talk about the differences between winning an argument and reconciliation? Can you admit when you are wrong? Are you willing to endure being told you were wrong, even though you were actually right?

Verses 27-30

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:27-30.

Observation: God judges the heart. A person who commits adultery is guilty, but a person who desires adultery, even though they don't actually do so, is also guilty in God's eyes because God knows the intent of our hearts.

Is Jesus's instructions to cut off our hand and gouge out our eye literal? No. Jesus is using hyperbole. If it were literal, the whole world would have neither eyes nor hands, nor any other parts of their body. Furthermore, we already know that sin does not come from the eye or the hand. Sin comes from the heart.

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander. These are what defile a man...(Matthew 15:19-20a)

Discussion: Regarding the human heart, God says, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put

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My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and to carefully observe My ordinances.

King David also prayed, “create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

God doesn’t actually desire that we cut off our hands or gouge out our eyes; what He truly wants is for us to have a new heart. **The question is:** how does that transformation happen?

Hint: If your study group struggles with that question, here are a few points that may jumpstart the discussion: Repent, put your faith in Jesus, (ask, seek, knock), lean not upon your own understanding.

Verses 31-32

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:31-32.

Observations:

In the United States, “irreconcilable differences” is a legally valid ground for divorce under state law. Yet, just 6 verses ago in Matthew 5:25 Jesus, talked about reconciling with an adversary.

In a divorce, a person’s spouse often becomes the adversary with whom they should reconcile. Now in Matthew 5:31-32, Jesus teaches that if a man divorces his wife, he brings adultery upon her in her next relationship. In Matthew chapter eighteen Jesus also says,

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. (Matthew 18:6)

When a man divorces his wife for any reason other than sexual immorality; especially for something as petty as “irreconcilable differences”; he causes one of God’s little ones to sin by bringing adultery upon her in her next relationship. Jesus warns that it would be better for that man to have tied a millstone around his neck and drowned in the sea than to stand before God on judgment day and give an account.

Fortunately, for those who put their faith in Christ, every sin is forgiven and remembered no more; they are cast as far as the east is from the west. Praise the name of Jesus! But those who reject Christ and persist in sin; including divorcing their spouse and causing adultery; there remains a coming day of reckoning so dreadful that drowning in the sea would have been the lesser fate.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10a)

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Discussion: How does understanding marriage as a covenant, rather than a contract, affect our efforts toward reconciliation in marriage?

Jesus says divorce can cause a man's wife to fall into sin. What does this teach us about the responsibility husbands have as the spiritual leader of their home and marriage?

What role does forgiveness and reconciliation play in preventing divorce?

For those who have experienced divorce, how can forgiveness and restoration in Christ bring comfort and healing?

Verses 33-37

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:33-37.

Observation: These verses are about not making vows to the Lord. It's much better to not make a promise than to break a promise to God.

Examples:

Someone is trapped in a car accident and prays: "God, if you get me out of this alive, I'll dedicate my life to serving you."

A person diagnosed with cancer says: "Lord, if you heal me, I'll spend every day telling others about your goodness."

Someone says:

"God, if You bless my business, I'll give half of my profits to the church."

"If You give us a child, we will dedicate him or her fully to Your service."

"If You help me get this job, I'll never drink alcohol again."

Discussion: We can pray: "Lord please save me from this car accident", "Lord please heal my body from cancer", "Lord please bless my business", "Lord please give us a child". But why is it wrong to make vows to God and to try to negotiate with God your desired outcome?

Hint: It's wrong to make vows to God in order to negotiate for our desired outcome because that comes from a place of trying to bargain with God instead of trusting Him. When we say, "If You do this for me, then I'll do that for You," we're treating God like someone who can be manipulated or persuaded by a deal. But God is not moved by bargains; He is moved by faith and obedience.

Verses 38-42

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Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:38-42.

Observations: Verse 38 is talking about justice. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.’” This was the Old Testament principle intended to maintain fairness in judgment. But Jesus is instructing us to not resist an evil person. He then gives 3 examples of the types of evil he’s referring to: a slap, getting sued, and compelled labor. Notice that these 3 examples deal with everyday, ordinary offenses. Jesus didn’t say we shouldn’t resist someone trying to kill us, or someone trying to harm our children. Jesus is not advocating for passive victimhood. Furthermore, this author believes that if an evil person tries to slap you, you can bob and weave to avoid the slap without violating this principal.

Jesus is telling us not to resist the evil person with payback. Jesus is calling for us to forgo personal retaliation. Scripture elsewhere clearly instructs us to resist the devil (James 4:7), and oppose false teachers. But in these verses, Jesus is instructing us not to retaliate. Not to return evil for evil.

Discussion: How do Jesus’ instructions challenge our natural desire for payback when we’re insulted or mistreated?

Verses 43-48

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:43-48.

Observation: In verse 43 Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor’ and ‘Hate your enemy’”. “Love your neighbor” is found in Leviticus 19:18, but “hate your enemy” does not appear in Scripture. This shows that the Israelites added human tradition to God’s Word. So much so that when Jesus quotes it, the crowd knows exactly what he’s talking about. Instead of hatred, Jesus commands us to show love toward our enemies. This love is not merely tolerance, but active goodwill including praying for those who persecute you.

God himself does this every day when he allows the sun to rise upon the evil and brings rain upon those who hate him.

Discussion: Why does Jesus point to the example of God sending sun and rain on both the righteous and the wicked? What does that teach us about His character?

Hint: But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Therefore, since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from wrath through Him! For if, when we were enemies of God, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! (Romans 5:8-10)

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Invitation: We were enemies of God, yet he loved us so much that he sent his son to die in our place. All one has to do now, to receive salvation and eternal life, is to put their faith in Jesus Christ. If you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, this is your opportunity to accept His gift of forgiveness and be reconciled to God. Just as God's love reached us when we were far from Him, He offers you new life, peace, and hope through Jesus Christ.

[End of Matthew chapter 5]

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