

A detailed painting of a coastal town, likely representing a biblical setting. In the foreground, a large crowd of people is gathered on a rocky shore, some sitting and some standing. Several boats are docked in the harbor, with people on board. In the background, a town with a prominent church spire and a bridge is visible on a hillside. The sky is filled with clouds and a few birds are flying.

LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: BECOMING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A PUBLICATION OF RAY REYNOLDS RAP

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
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LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT:

Becoming the Kingdom of God

Ray Reynolds Rap Publication

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This study guide was created by Ray Reynolds in 2015, edited in 2019, and copyrighted by Ray Reynolds Rap Publications in 2021. The material presented in this series will be gleaned from personal notes, the New King James Study Bible, the New Century Version, Andy Duncan, Tom Fair, Billy Lambert, Dr. Coy Roper, Dr. Steven Guy, Jerry Davidson, Robert H. Gundry, B.W. Johnson, Mark Copeland, John Scott, Eugene Pigg, Dan Winkler, and other various sources.

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INTRODUCTION:

There are many ways in which Jesus led the people to see His true nature. One of the ways that He did that was through His preaching and teaching. Consider the time devoted throughout the Gospels to the sermons of Jesus. Christians should be truly grateful for the saints and scholars that preserved the teachings of Jesus. Praise be to God that we can read the actual words of Jesus on the printed page!

One of the greatest sermons Jesus ever preached is called the Sermon on the Mount. It is recorded in the gospel of **Matthew 5-7**. Many who read the Sermon on the Mount often see it as a wonderful lesson on how to be a Christian. I've often heard people call it the "Constitution of the Church." Those descriptions are only part of the message of Jesus. The truth of the matter is that it was during this time Jesus was in the process of choosing His 12 apostles. He was looking for men who would be prepared to endure many hardships.

The underlying message of the Sermon on the Mount is that the followers of Jesus would have to live radical lifestyles. They would have to give up oral traditions, false narratives about God and Judaism, and political correctness in addition to comfortable living and peaceful surroundings. Living in the way of Jesus would be difficult. It's not easy to follow the Sermon on the Mount. It's teachings are not for the faint of heart or weak minded.

Jesus was aware that many of His followers would fall away. Several of those in this audience would not even recognize Him as the Messiah. Many more would completely reject Him. However, among this group there were those who had "ears to hear" and would accept Jesus' teaching (**Matthew 7:24-27**). They needed to be ready and aware of the pitfalls. They needed to know what was necessary to become the kingdom of God!

Pitfall #1 = Improper Attitudes (Matthew 5:1-12)... In the first part of the message Jesus challenges His disciples to become His agents in the world. The nine statements Jesus made at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount are a counter-cultural definition of true happiness. Before He can tackle other subjects, He has to start with one's attitude toward God and others. Later we will find out that this is because those are the two greatest commandments. Without the proper attitude, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God.

Pitfall #2 = Faulty Behavior (Matthew 5:13-16)... In the next wave of teaching Jesus identifies that those attitudes (previously mentioned) determine one's actions. Jesus challenged His followers to be like salt—flavoring and preserving the world with the gospel—and light—demonstrating the gospel with godly actions. Once you've discovered "*the way, the truth and the life*" (**John 14:6**), you can't keep it hidden from others. You will become a city on a hill. Without the proper behavior, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God.

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Pitfall #3 = Neglecting Study & Application (Matthew 5:17-48)... The Pharisees were clearly guilty of not reading and applying the word of God. These men were considered to be the experts of the law. One major pitfall a disciple faces includes not studying the word of God enough, or studying it but not making proper application. Throughout this section of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus reveals that God was going to be fulfilling the old law, and beginning a new law. The new covenant of God would focus on grace and love in addition to obedience. Those who are obedient to God are doing it because they love Him, not just because they are required to follow Him. Without the proper understanding of Scripture, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God.

Pitfall #4 = Working For Praise (Matthew 6:1-4)... Jesus begins this section with three of His favorite subjects: prayer, fasting, and giving. He talks about these things more any other subjects. Jesus says His disciples are to do all things with our Heavenly Father in mind. We are to concern ourselves with "the audience of One." When that becomes the focus of our lives, worrying about things like money, possessions, clothes or food all take their proper place (**Matthew 6:33**). Jesus encourages his followers to do good deeds. This is a major challenge for those who like praise. Without the proper approach to good works, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God.

Pitfall #5 = Theatrical Prayer Life (Matthew 6:5-14)... A famous preacher once said, "If you need to catch up on your prayer life do it at home." The Pharisees made it a goal to "Pray to the Gallery," and made it a spectacle. Jesus in essence is saying, "Don't pray for show, pray to the God you know." The religious leaders of this day loved to stand up in front of people and use big words when they prayed. For them it was about the public demonstration. Jesus makes prayer personal, practical, and powerful. Without the proper prayer life, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God.

Pitfall #6 = Fasting For Attention (Matthew 6:15-18)... The religious leaders of Jesus's day are called hypocrites in this passage. The term "hypocrite" basically means play actor. Jesus is condemning their behavior because it was all about drama. It seems that most of their religious acts were done for show, so Jesus chooses to recognize them on a public stage. It is sad that they had turned religious activities into such a farce, when many sincere people just wanted a relationship with their Heavenly Father. Fasting was another personal issue that the Jews abused. Without the proper discipline and self-denial, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God.

Pitfall #7 = Trying to Serve Two Masters (Matthew 6:19-24)... Trying to serve two masters is never successful. Jesus says you'll end up either hating one and loving the other, or being loyal to one and despise any other. You can't serve both God and money (or material possessions). It is clear that Jesus is using an analogy here to describe idolatry. Idolatry is described in the Old Testament is spiritual adultery. When followers of God choose to serve Him and something else, God ends up getting pushed to the back. Your mind might go back to the 10 Commandments when you read this section of Scripture. We are reminded that the Lord our God must come first...He alone must be worshipped. Without the proper priorities, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God.

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Pitfall #8 = Worrying Instead of Seeking (Matthew 6:25-34)... Jesus offers some of the most encouraging verses in this passage. We often overlook the fact that by putting God first, He will take care of the rest. The Lord is building upon His previous statements about trusting God in prayer, putting him first instead of riches, and letting Him rule our lives. Now He shows us that worrying about ourselves, instead of seeking God's will, accomplishes nothing. He will have more to say about this in Chapter 7. Without the proper trust in God, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God.

Pitfall #9 = Unfair Judging (Matthew 7:1-6)... For some reason, this is always a hot button issue. Unfair judging leads to more than heart ache and misunderstanding among people. Jesus will later reveal in future teachings that the greater our judgment is upon other people, the harsher our judgment will be on judgment day. Judging others with pride can condemn your soul to eternal death. Those who are unrepentant, or unconvinced of changing their ways, do not respond well to harsh criticism and a judgmental spirit. They are more likely to resent you and attack you if you pass judgment on their conduct. Without the proper spirit, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God.

Pitfall #10 = Doing It Alone (Matthew 7:7-14)... Many times our pride gets in the way and we try to do things on our own. Jesus takes a moment here to explain that ALL we need to do is ask. Our Heavenly Father will provide all of our needs for us. He has created us in such a way that we can do good... but He IS good.... all the time! We should learn to treat others in the way we want to be treated, because God is so good to us when we don't deserve it. Jesus also urges His followers to be willing to go down the road less travelled. Without the proper dependence and direction, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God.

Pitfall #11 = Being Deceived by False Prophets (Matthew 7:15-23)... Apparently there were many false teachers deceiving people in this day. Jesus challenges His disciples to learn the truth for themselves. This was a major pitfall for people in that generation. We forget that it was only about 400-500 years ago people gained a newfound respect for the holy Word of God. Followers of Christ spent hundreds of years trying to translate the Bible into their native tongues, only to be oppressed. Some suffered harsh penalties, persecution, torture, and even death! It is hard for us to believe that hundreds of people were burned at the stake just for wanting to read the Bible. Without the proper dedication to the cause, and desire to seek the truth, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God.

Pitfall #12 = Building a Weak Foundation (Matthew 7:24-27)... When we build upon anything other than the words of Christ, we are building on a weak foundation that is destined to crumble. Jesus challenges us to hear and obey God's word. To avoid the pitfalls in life, keep your eyes on Jesus! Listen to his teachings! Jesus concluded His sermon with a great illustration about a wise man and a foolish man. Which are you? Each of us should be challenged as we read through the Sermon on the Mount! No doubt, it was and is the will of Christ Jesus that we avoid these pitfalls. He battled His entire ministry with religious people who suffered from unbelief. They were suffering from spiritual decay from within. In many respects we suffer from the same things in the church today.

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Pitfall #1 = *Improper Attitudes* (Matthew 5:1-12)

Introduction: For the next few weeks we will consider this famous teaching of Jesus by considering it as a warning to those who think following Him would be easy. We must not allow ourselves to be like the world. We are becoming the children of God. This means we have to radically change our life to follow Jesus. There are pitfalls we must avoid if we want to become the kingdom of God. In this lesson we will focus on the first pitfall and study the Beattitudes. Let's study together....

Discussion:

I. Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3)

This reflects the HUMILIATION of self.

How can we become poor in spirit?

What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

II. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

This reflects the REPENTANCE from sin.

Why should we mourn?

What is the purpose of mourning?

III. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5)

This reflects the SUBMISSION to God and others in authority.

What does it mean to be meek/humble?

Why is that important?

IV. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. (Matthew 5:6)

This reflects the PASSION to be right.

What does this mean?

How can we be filled?

Why should we seek to be filled for righteousness sake?

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V. ***Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. (Matthew 5:7)***

This reflects the COMPASSION for those hurting.

Why does God expect mercy of His people?

What is the spiritual purpose of mercy?

VI. ***Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)***

This reflects the SANCTIFICATION from world.

What does the world think about purity?

Does that make it hard to possess this virtue?

VII. ***Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)***

This reflects the COOPERATION with others.

Why does the world like conflict?

How can we be a peacemaker in a world of turmoil?

VII. ***Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:10)***

This reflects the CONVICTION enough to suffer.

Do you enjoy suffering? Explain.

Why would God bless those who suffer?

IX. ***Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11-12)***

This reflects the RESOLUTION to be steadfast.

How can we rejoice in the face of persecution?

What are the benefits of allowing God to handle our enemies?

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Conclusion: Did you notice that each beatitudes consists of three components: 1) claim, 2) characteristic, and 3) consequence? Do you possess these attitudes? Each of us should be challenged as we read through the Sermon on the Mount! What parts of Christ's message do you need to apply today in your life? Will you follow the direction of the Master Teacher? We need to live with these attitudes every day of our lives. Let's become the kingdom of God and live the Sermon on the Mount!

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Pitfall #2 = *Faulty Behavior* (Matthew 5:13-16)

Introduction: There are many ways in which Jesus let the people see His true nature. One of the ways that He did that is through His preaching and teaching. Consider the time devoted throughout the Gospels to the sermons of Jesus. Christians should be truly grateful for the scholars that preserved the teachings of Jesus. One of the greatest sermons Jesus ever preached is called the Sermon on the Mount. It is recorded in the gospel of Matthew chapters 5-7. In this lesson we will focus on the second pitfall and discover the importance of building on good attitudes to have good behavior. Our attitudes and thoughts determine our actions. Jesus challenged His followers to be like salt—flavoring and preserving the world with the gospel—and light—demonstrating the gospel with godly actions. Once you’ve discovered “*the way, the truth and the life*” (**John 14:6**), you can’t keep it hidden (**Matthew 5:14-16**) from others. Let’s study together....

Discussion:

L.I.G.H.T. O.F. T.H.E. W.O.R.L.D.

Living like Jesus, because we belong to Him (**Colossians 1:18**)

Instant in season and out of season (**II Timothy 4:2**)

Given to hospitality (**Romans 12:13**)

Hoping for what we do not see (**Romans 8:24-25**)

Teaching the truth in love (**Ephesians 4:15**)

Overcoming evil with good (**Romans 12:21**)

Fervent in spirit (**Romans 12:11**)

Telling the good news to everyone we meet (**Mark 16:15-16**)

Having the mind of Christ (**Philippians 2:5**)

Equipping the saints and edifying the body of Christ (**Ephesians 4:12**)

Willing to sacrifice themselves for Christ (**Romans 12:1-2**)

Opposing those who teach false doctrine (**II Peter 2:1**)

Righteous people that keep the law (**I Timothy 1:9**)

Loving one another (**I John 3:23**)

Devoted to the ministry of saints (**I Corinthians 16:15**)

S.A.L.T. O.F. T.H.E. E.A.R.T.H.

Serving God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (**Hebrews 12:28**)

Avoiding those who cause division (**Romans 16:17**)

Living in the world but not subjecting ourselves to it (**Colossians 2:20**)

Testing the spirits (**I John 4:1**)

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Owing no one anything except love (**Romans 13:8**)

Forgiving one another as we are forgiven (**Colossians 3:13**)

Trusting in God (**I Timothy 4:10**)

Honoring all people and honoring the King (**I Peter 2:17**)

Eagerly waiting for the hope of righteousness by faith (**Galatians 5:5**)

Earnestly expecting opportunities to glorify God (**Philippians 1:20**)

Assembling at every opportunity (**Hebrews 10:24-25**)

Rightly dividing the Word of God (**II Timothy 2:15**)

Tenderhearted and kind behavior (**Ephesians 4:32**)

Holy as the Lord is Holy (**I Peter 1:15**)

C.I.T.Y. O.N. A. H.I.L.L.

Compassion for the lost (**I Peter 3:8**)

Involved in the Lord's work (**Ephesians 4:11-16**)

Try to shine your light (**Philippians 2:15**)

Yearn for good works (**Ephesians 2:10**)

Oppose wickedness by fighting the good fight (**II Timothy 4:6-8**)

Never take off the whole armor of God (**Ephesians 6:10-20**)

Accept and seek the Lord above all (**Matthew 6:33**)

Honor those lead among you (**Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24**)

Ignore the haters and pray for them (**Matthew 5:10-12, 44**)

Learn to do things better (**II Peter 3:18**)

Leave a legacy (**II Timothy 2:2**)

Conclusion: Are you ready to be the light of the world? Are you prepared to be the salt of the earth? Can people see you like a city on a hill? Will you follow the direction of the Master Teacher? We need both a proper attitude (**Matthew 5:1-12**) and proper behavior (**Matthew 5:13-16**) to thrive in the kingdom of God. Let's become the kingdom of God and live the Sermon on the Mount!

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Pitfall #3 = Neglecting Study & Application (Matthew 5:17-48)

Introduction: We are studying one of the greatest sermons ever preached. It is called the "Sermon on the Mount." It is recorded in **Matthew 5-7**. We will notice 12 sections and identify 12 pitfalls facing the kingdom of God. If we want to live the "Sermon on the Mount," and become the kingdom of God, we need to avoid these pitfalls. In this lesson we will focus on the third pitfall and discover the importance of Bible study and application. Let's open our Bibles and study together....

Discussion:

I. The Truth About The Law of God (Matthew 5:17-19)

Did Jesus come to destroy the Law? Explain.

How can we know Jesus came to fulfill the law?

How can we apply this teaching to kingdom living?

II. The Truth About The Righteousness of the Scribe & Pharisees (Matthew 5:20)

What does Jesus say to offer a significant change concerning righteous living?

Why is it dangerous to set up religious people as a pattern to follow?

How can we apply this teaching to kingdom living?

III. The Truth About Murder & Anger (Matthew 5:21-26)

What does Jesus say to offer a significant change concerning murder/anger?

How can we apply this teaching to kingdom living?

IV. The Truth About Adultery (Matthew 5:27-30)

What does Jesus say to offer a significant change concerning views on adultery?

Which is worse, the physical act of adultery or the inward lust of the heart? Explain.

How can we apply this teaching to kingdom living?

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V. The Truth About Divorce (Matthew 5:31-32)

What does Jesus say to offer a significant change concerning divorce?

If marriage is a covenant with God, and God hates divorce (**Malachi 2:16**), why does He give an exception for those who seek to break it?

Why do you think Mark (**Mark 10:1-12**) and Luke (**Luke 16:18**) leave out the exception?

How can we apply this teaching to kingdom living?

VI. The Truth About Oaths (Matthew 5:33-37)

What does Jesus say to offer a significant change concerning making foolish vows?

Why did Jesus address oaths sworn by heaven or by earth (**Matthew 23:16-22**)?

How can we apply this teaching to kingdom living?

VII. The Truth About Vengeance (Matthew 5:38-42)

What does Jesus say to offer a significant change concerning revenge?

If the old law was intended to limit revenge, why are there so many stories that contain it?

How can we apply this teaching to kingdom living?

VIII. The Truth About Enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)

What does Jesus say to offer a significant change concerning our treatment of enemies?

If there are no commands to hate your enemies in the Old Testament, why was it taught?

How can we apply this teaching to kingdom living?

Conclusion: What is the ultimate goal of kingdom living? We have been called to follow Jesus! How can we do that? **Galatians 5:16** says, "Live by following the Spirit." When we learn to live by following the Holy Spirit of God, we won't walk by the flesh. God wants to lead you, guide you, and inspire you to live the life He has planned for you. Let's become the kingdom of God!

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Pitfall #4 = *Working For Praise* (Matthew 6:1-4)

Introduction: We are studying one of the greatest sermons ever preached. It is called the "Sermon on the Mount." It is recorded in **Matthew 5-7**. We will notice 12 sections and identify 12 pitfalls facing the kingdom of God. If we want to live the "Sermon on the Mount," and become the kingdom of God, we need to avoid these pitfalls. In this lesson we will focus on the fourth pitfall which is working for praise and attention.

The Pharisees were clearly guilty of doing things for the praise of men. Common religious practices like giving (**Matthew 6:1-4**), praying (**Matthew 6:5-15**), and fasting (**Matthew 6:16-18**) had become a spectacle. The Jews consider keeping the law, through these specific practices, could be proof of superior piety and righteousness. Jesus doesn't condemn the deeds, or rebuke the expectation of reward, but He does seek to censure the demonstrations in the streets. Let's study together....

Discussion:

I. The Prerequisite For Charitable Deeds (Matthew 6:1)

Why does God command us to give? (**I Corinthians 16:1-2, II Corinthians 8:1-5, 9:7**)

What happens if we do not give to God? (**Malachi 3:8**)

What can we learn from the generosity of the early church? (**Acts 2:44-45, Acts 4:32-37**)

Why is it important to avoid displays of hypocrisy? (**Matthew 5:16-18, 7:12**)

How does your work relate to your reward? (**Matthew 6:2, 5, 16**)

II. The Passion For Charitable Deeds (Matthew 6:2-4)

What should we avoid when we are giving?

Why was it so dangerous for the Jews to practice such hypocrisy?

What should we practice when we are giving?

Is it difficult to follow this teaching of Jesus? Explain.

What kind of giving does God require? Why?

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III. The Prize For Charitable Deeds (Matthew 6:4)

What is the purpose of charitable deeds?

How can we know that the Father will reward us? (**Matthew 6:1-18, 33, 7:7**)

Will we receive blessings in this life based on our giving? (**Psalms 41:1-3, Ephesians 1:3**)

Will we receive blessings in the next life based on our giving? (**Ecclesiastes 12:14, II Corinthians 5:10, I Timothy 6:17-19**)

How can we know punishment and rewards are based on our giving? (**Matthew 25:13-46**)

What do we know about the benevolence of the disciples and the early church? Did they apply this teaching?

Conclusion: Are you blessed? If we have been blessed as a steward of God, then we have been given charge of those gifts for a reason. Christians should be "*rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share*" (**I Timothy 6:17-19**). Jesus assumes that His disciples would be charitable (**Matthew 5:42**). He was correct! They were very generous! They were willing to follow Jesus' great example. In the next section Jesus will talk about the necessity of prayer and fasting. These practices relate very closely to the subject we study today. Read that section of Scripture and be ready for next week's class. Let's become the kingdom of God and live the Sermon on the Mount!

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Pitfall #5 = Theatrical Prayer Life (Matthew 6:5-14)

Introduction: We are studying one of the greatest sermons ever preached. It is called the "Sermon on the Mount." It is recorded in **Matthew 5-7**. We will notice 12 sections and identify 12 pitfalls facing the kingdom of God. If we want to live the "Sermon on the Mount," and become the kingdom of God, we need to avoid these pitfalls. In this lesson we will focus on the fifth pitfall which is making a mockery of prayer that is seen as theatrical or overly dramatic.

We noticed last week that the Pharisees were guilty of doing things for the praise of men. This section of the Sermon on the Mount deals with the abuse of common religious practices like giving (**Matthew 6:1-4**), praying (**Matthew 6:5-15**), and fasting (**Matthew 6:16-18**). Clearly it had become a spectacle in the streets. The Jews (hypocrites/actors) used these "shows" as a proof of superior piety and righteousness above others. Jesus doesn't condemn the deeds, or rebuke the expectation of reward, but He does seek to censure the demonstrations in the streets. Let's study together....

Discussion:

I. The Abuse of Prayer (Matthew 6:5)

How did the Pharisees "love" to pray?

What title is perfect for such action?

What does Jesus say about their reward?

Who is the only One to judge such hypocrisy?

How can your actions affect your reward?

II. The Attitude of Prayer (Matthew 6:6-8)

What are the benefits of praying in secret?

How can praying in public encourage hypocrisy?

Why should we pray at all if the Father already knows the content?

Is it difficult to follow this teaching of Jesus? Explain.

What kind of prayer pleases God? Why?

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III. The Action of Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)

Why did Jesus give us this pattern for prayer? Was it meant to be a repetitive prayer?

What is the content of this prayer?

1) Reverence God & His Name (**Matthew 6:9**)

2) Kingdom Progress (**Matthew 6:10**)

3) Physical Needs (**Matthew 6:11**)

4) Spiritual Needs (**Matthew 6:12-13**)

5) Praise & Glorify God (**Matthew 6:13**)

Will we receive blessings in this life based on our prayers?

Will we receive blessings in the next life based on our prayers?

How can we know punishment and rewards are based on our praying?

IV. The Application of Prayer (Matthew 6:14-15)

How can prayer help us with our self-centeredness?

Why does Jesus reiterate the point about forgiving others?

If we do not forgive others, what is our fate?

If we judge others, what is our fate?

What has Jesus taught us about forgiveness, mercy, and grace?

Conclusion: When we approach our holy God, and lift up His sacred and hallowed name, we must remember that He is our Heavenly Father. He views us as His sons and daughters. As the children of God we must learn to walk in our Father's footsteps. Jesus has clearly left us a pattern to follow. Let's become the kingdom of God and live the Sermon on the Mount!

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Pitfall #6 = *Fasting For Attention* (Matthew 6:15-18)

Introduction: We are studying one of the greatest sermons ever preached called the "Sermon on the Mount" (**Matthew 5-7**). We will notice 12 pitfalls facing the kingdom of God. In this lesson we will focus on the sixth pitfall which is making a mockery of the spiritual discipline of fasting. We noticed last week that the Pharisees were guilty of doing things for the praise of men giving (**Matthew 6:1-4**), praying (**Matthew 6:5-15**), and fasting (**Matthew 6:16-18**). The religious leaders of Jesus's day are called hypocrites (i.e. play actor). Jesus condemns the behavior of the religious elite because to them it was all about drama. It seems that most of their religious acts were done for show (as previously noted), so Jesus chooses to recognize their hypocrisy on a public stage. Sadly they turned religious activities into such a farce, when many sincere people just wanted a relationship with their Heavenly Father. Fasting was not meant to be abused. Without the proper discipline and self-denial, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God. Let's study together...

Discussion:

I. The Abuse of Fasting (Matthew 6:16)

When did they fast in the Old Testament?

- When observing a religious holy day (**Leviticus 16:29-31, 23:26-32, Numbers 29:7**)
- When confronting warfare or the threat of warfare (**Judges 20:26, I Samuel 7:6**)
- When physically or mentally sick (**II Samuel 12:16-23, Psalm 35:11-13**)
- When grieving or facing personal loss (**I Samuel 31:13, II Samuel 1:12**)
- When seeking God's forgiveness (**Deuteronomy 9:15-18, Jonah 3:4-10**)
- When handling dangerous circumstances (**Ezra 8:21, Esther 4:3, 16**)
- When dealing with natural disaster or terrorism (**Jeremiah 52:12-13, II Kings 25:1-4**)

Why did they fast in the Old Testament? How did they fast in the Old Testament?

- For the purpose of "*afflicting the soul*" (**Leviticus 23:26-32**)
- For the purpose of "*chastening the soul*" (**Psalm 69:10**)
- For the purpose of "*humbling*" one's self in the sight of God (**Psalm 35:13, Ezra 8:21-23**)

How long did they fast in the Old Testament?

- One day fasts (**Judges 20:26, I Samuel 14:24, II Samuel 3:35**)
- One evening fasts (**Daniel 6:18**)
- 3 days and nights (**Esther 4:16**)
- 7 days and nights (**I Samuel 31:13, I Chronicles 10:12**)
- 40 days and nights (**Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 9:9, I Kings 19:8**)

What were they told about fasting in the Old Testament? (**Isaiah 58, Zechariah 7:1-14**)

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II. The Attitude of Fasting (Matthew 6:16)

Who were the disciples told NOT to emulate when fasting? Why?

If Jesus were going to do away with fasting, wouldn't He put it to rest here?

Why is it important to get our attitude right, before the action (**Matthew 5:3-12**)?

III. The Action of Fasting (Matthew 6:17-18)

What specific instructions are given for proper fasting?

What is the significance of anointing your head and washing your face?

Why is important not to let others know when you're fasting?

IV. The Application of Fasting (Matthew 6:17-18)

When did they fast in the New Testament?

How did Jesus feel about fasting (**Matthew 4:1-9, 9:14-17, 17:14-21, Mark 2:18-20, 9:14-29, Luke 4:1-2, 5:33-39**)?

How did the Paul feel about fasting (**I Corinthians 7:5, II Corinthians 6:4-10, 11:23-28**)?

How did the early church feel about fasting (**Acts 13:1-3, 14:21-23**)?

If we seek to emulate the New Testament church, how should we feel about fasting today?

What are the dangers of fasting hypocritically (**Matthew 6:16-18**)? Ritualistically (**Matthew 9:14-17**)? Haphazardly (**Isaiah 58:3-9**)?

When we fast, why should it be done biblically (following God's pattern)?

Conclusion: The most important thing to remember about fasting is that it was meant to improve the relationship between God and man. How is your relationship to God? Do you seek the will of God for your life? Follow God! Do you seek to follow the pattern of the early church? Be the church of Christ! Let's become the kingdom of God and live the Sermon on the Mount!

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Pitfall #7 = Trying to Serve Two Masters (Matthew 6:19-24)

Introduction: We are studying one of the greatest sermons ever preached called the "Sermon on the Mount" (**Matthew 5-7**). We will notice 12 pitfalls facing the kingdom of God. If we want to live the "Sermon on the Mount," and become the kingdom of God, we need to avoid these pitfalls. In this lesson we will focus on the seventh pitfall which is trying to serve two masters.

Trying to serve two masters is never successful. Jesus says you'll end up either hating one and loving the other, or being loyal to one and despise any other. He shows us the dangers of idolatry. Idolatry is described in the Old Testament is spiritual adultery. When followers of God choose to serve Him and something else, God ends up getting pushed to the back (see the 10 Commandments). We are reminded that the Lord our God must come first... He alone must be worshipped. Without the proper priorities, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God. Let's study together...

Discussion:

I. Treasures in Heaven vs. Treasures on Earth (Matthew 6:19-21)

What happens to treasures on the earth?

What happens to treasures in heaven?

What are the most important things on earth?

Why should we store heavenly treasures rather than earthly ones?

Is Jesus teaching us that we should not accumulate personal property, savings accounts, insurance policies, etc.? Explain.

What are the dangers of focusing on earthly things?

What are the dangers of neglecting heavenly things?

How can we "lay up treasures" in heaven?

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II. The Lamp of the Body (Matthew 6:22-23)

What does the "body" represent?

What does the "eye" represent?

How can physical and spiritual sight be similar?

Why does Jesus use the illustration of light and darkness? What does it mean?

III. The Mystery of Two Masters (Matthew 6:24)

How does our choice of master affect our walk?

How can serving two masters distract and discourage us?

Why does Jesus use the terms of love and hate in this context?

Why does Jesus use the term loyal and despise in this context?

What is mammon? Why is it used in this context?

Conclusion: If one has already followed the previous teachings of Jesus (giving, praying, fasting, etc.) it's not hard to see the priorities of disciples of Christ are different than the world. Jesus is obviously teaching us to choose God above all! No one, and nothing, should get in our way from following Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The things of this world will decay, be stolen, or blind us from what is truly important. We need to put off selfishness and take our focus off of earthly things. It's time to turn our eyes towards heaven! Let's become the kingdom of God and live the Sermon on the Mount!

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Pitfall #8 = Worrying Instead of Seeking (Matthew 6:25-34)

Introduction: We are studying one of the greatest sermons ever preached called the "Sermon on the Mount" (**Matthew 5-7**). We will notice 12 pitfalls facing the kingdom of God. If we want to live the "Sermon on the Mount," and become the kingdom of God, we need to avoid these pitfalls. In this lesson we will focus on the eighth pitfall which is worrying instead of seeking the will of God.

Jesus offers some of the most encouraging verses in this passage. We often overlook the fact that by putting God first, He will take care of the rest. The Lord is building upon His previous statements about trusting God in prayer, putting him first instead of riches, and letting Him rule our lives. Now He shows us that worrying about ourselves, instead of seeking God's will, accomplishes nothing. He will have more to say about this in Chapter 7. Without the proper trust in God, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God. Let's study together...

Discussion:

I. If You Worry... Think About The Birds (Matthew 6:25-27)

What has Jesus already said about material things (vs.19-24)?

Why do we worry about what we eat and drink?

What can we learn from the birds?

Which is more valuable: birds or humans? Why?

Can anyone add/subtract height or weight by worrying about it? Why do some people choose radical steps to alter their appearance?

The term "stature" probably refers to life span. How can worrying actually decrease your lifespan? What does it do to you when you worry?

How can reading the book of Ecclesiastes help someone who is worrying?

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II. If You Worry... Think About The Flowers (Matthew 6:28-30)

Why do we need to be reminded that life is more than food and clothes?

What can we learn from the lilies of the field?

What is the purpose of reference to King Solomon?

If God is powerful enough to create us, don't you think He would be powerful enough to provide for us? Then why do we worry? Explain.

When we worry often, what does it say about our faith? How has fear overtaken us?

III. If You Worry... Think About The Creator (Matthew 6:31-34)

What happens when we begin to vocalize our worries?

What is the purpose of the reference to the Gentiles?

How can we give God our total loyalty and commitment? What will happen if we do?

How does this conclude the arguments about laying up treasure in heaven (**Matthew 6:19-24, Matthew 19:21, Luke 12:33-34, I Timothy 6:17-19**)?

Why is it futile worrying about tomorrow?

Conclusion: Worrying about things of this world can disable our faith. Fear and frustration should not be our "default" when difficult times come to us. We should fall back on our faith! God has always fulfilled His promises. He will provide! We must trust that God knows what He is doing and that His will is greater! Let's become the kingdom of God and live the Sermon on the Mount!

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Pitfall #9 = Unfair Judging (Matthew 7:1-6)

Introduction: We are studying one of the greatest sermons ever preached called the "Sermon on the Mount" (**Matthew 5-7**). We will notice 12 pitfalls facing the kingdom of God. If we want to live the "Sermon on the Mount" we need to avoid these pitfalls. Remember that we have already discussed the righteousness of God's kingdom in respect to Him. Now we are noticing what is necessary of someone who has decided to seek first the kingdom of God, specifically in relationship with others. Jesus will talk about judging others, asking, seeking, knocking, and the Golden rule.

In this lesson we will focus on the ninth pitfall which is unfair judging. For some reason, this is always a hot button issue. Unfair judging leads to more than heart ache and misunderstanding than we could ever imagine. Jesus will reveal that the greater our judgment is upon other people, the harsher our judgment when He returns. Judging others with pride can condemn your soul to eternal death. Those who are unrepentant, or unconvinced of changing their ways, do not respond well to harsh criticism and a judgmental spirit. They are more likely to resent you if you pass judgment on them. Without the proper spirit, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God. Let's study together...

Discussion:

I. You Are NOT The Judge (Matthew 7:1-2)

Who is our Judge (**Genesis 16:5, Judges 11:27, Psalm 50:4-6, 75:7, 76:8-9, 82:1, Isaiah 3:13, 33:22, 66:16, Joel 3:12, Micah 4:3, James 5:9, Revelation 20:11-15**)?

Why must we never forget the fact that God is our Judge (**James 2:4, 4:11-12**)?

What do we know about the judgments of God (**II Timothy 4:8, Hebrews 12:23, James 4:12**)?

How is **John 7:24** often misunderstood (and even abused) to encourage judging others?

Is it possible for a human being to be a Righteous Judge (**Romans 2:1-27, 3:4-10, 14:10-13, Ecclesiastes 7:20, Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1-3, I Corinthians 4:3-5, 10:29, I Peter 2:23**)?

In what court are we able to judge (**I Corinthians 2:15, 10:15, 11:27-32, Colossians 2:16**)?

Does the role of the elders, and spiritual discipline, conflict with the things taught by Jesus and the apostle Paul (**Matthew 18:15-20, I Corinthians 6:2-5, 11:13**)?

How can we discern good fruit, teach the gospel, and proclaim the truth without judging?

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II. The In & Outs of Judging: Logs, Dogs, and Hogs (Matthew 7:3-6)

What happens when we begin to point out the speck in our brother's eye?

If we place ourselves in an elevated position (meaning we are superior/supreme and able to render judgment upon another human), how can our criticism have adverse effects?

What happens when we give holy things to the dogs?

If we let the dogs eat off the fine China (meaning we cast Scripture/law at those unwilling to receive it for what it is), how can that work against us?

What happens when we cast our pearls before swine?

If we give Grandma's pearls to the pigs (meaning we try to dress up unrepentant sinners), what will they do to the pearls? What will they do to us?

III. Judging Ourselves Instead of Others (Matthew 7:1-6)

Taking the entire context into consideration, who is responsible for the log in the eye, giving holy things to dogs, and casting pearls to the hogs?

What can we do to avoid God's judgment concerning our own hypocrisy (logs), ignorance (dogs), and arrogance (hogs)?

How can judging others work against us and impact our own eternal destiny?

Later, Jesus will warn the disciples about false teachers (**Matthew 7:15-20**). While we are able to warn, mark, critique, and condemn them... Who judges them (**Matthew 7:19, 21-23**)?

Are evil people deserving of condemnation? Does the Bible teach they will receive eternal damnation if they choose NOT to follow God?

Are we commanded to obey the gospel, live by faith, teach the truth, and stand for what is right? Does this ensure a good standing with God?

How can we convince others to join us on the straight and narrow (**Matthew 7:13-14**) and follow the words of Jesus (**Matthew 7:24-27**) without judging?

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Conclusion: Seeking the kingdom of God first means being content as a servant. God alone deserves to be the Chief Lawgiver and Judge of His kingdom. It is His message, His will, and we shouldn't get in His way. The Jews fell short by taking the Law into their own hands. Therefore, the Lord took the kingdom away and allowed tax collectors and prostitutes to come to the front of the line. We must learn from their mistakes! Let's become the kingdom of God and live the Sermon on the Mount!

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Pitfall #10 = Doing It Alone (Matthew 7:7-14)

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Many times our pride gets in the way and we try to do things on our own. Jesus takes a moment here to explain that ALL we need to do is ask. Our Heavenly Father will provide all of our needs for us. He has created us in such a way that we can do good... but He IS good.... all the time! We should learn to treat others in the way we want to be treated, because God is so good to us when we don't deserve it. Jesus also urges His followers to be willing to go down the road less travelled. Without the proper dependence and direction, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God. Let's study together...

Discussion:

I. Three Steps of Faith: Ask, Seek, Knock (Matthew 7:7-11)

Why should we keep on asking for what we need?

Why should we keep on seeking the answers?

Why should we keep on knocking if the door is shut?

How can we know that God appreciates our patience and perseverance?

What does this tell us about having confidence and boldness in our prayer life?

What is the purpose of the illustration concerning bread, fish, and giving good gifts?

How can the spirit of God bring us any other blessings?

What do we know about prayer (**John 14:13-14, 15:7, I John 5:14-15, James 4:3, 5:16**)?

II. The Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12)

What do other world religions teach that sounds similar? What about philosophers?

Why do so many other religious use this rule as a standard for living?

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What is so powerful about this teaching that it applies to everyone?

How can it be beneficial for a society to do good things to others?

How can we know what Jesus taught was in harmony with the Scriptures (**Leviticus 19:18, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Matthew 5:21-48**)?

What "rules" are greater than all others (**Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:26-27**)?

III. The Way to Eternal Life (Matthew 7:13-14)

How can one enter the narrow gate?

Where does Believers Boulevard lead? What do we know about others on this road?

How can one enter the broad gate?

Where does Un-Believers Boulevard lead? What do we know about others on this road?

Why do we prefer the easy road rather than the difficult one?

How can we know that Jesus is talking about entrance to the kingdom of God?

How can we enter the kingdom of God (**John 14:6, Matthew 16:19, Acts 2:38**)?

Conclusion: Life is hard. We cannot do it alone! This section seems to be wrapping with an invitation. It is a personal challenge the listeners. Will you enter the narrow gate? Will you discern the good fruit? Will you follow the will of the Father? Will you build on a good foundation? If you are willing to travel down the narrow road it will lead to eternal life! Let's become the kingdom of God and live the Sermon on the Mount!

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Pitfall #11 = Being Deceived by False Prophets (Matthew 7:15-23)

Introduction: We are studying one of the greatest sermons ever preached called the "Sermon on the Mount" (**Matthew 5-7**). We will notice 12 pitfalls facing the kingdom of God. If we want to live the "Sermon on the Mount," and become the kingdom of God, we need to avoid these pitfalls. In this lesson we will focus on the eleventh pitfall which is being deceived a false prophets/teachers.

Apparently there were many false teachers deceiving people in this day. Jesus is challenging His disciples to learn the truth for themselves. This was a major pitfall for people in that generation and many others as well. We forget that it was only about 400-500 years ago people gained a newfound respect for the holy Word of God. Followers of Christ spent hundreds of years trying to translate the Bible into their native tongues, only to be oppressed. Some of them suffered harsh penalties, persecution, torture, and even death! It is hard for us to believe that hundreds of people were burned at the stake just for wanting to read the Bible. Without the proper dedication to the cause, and desire to seek out the truth, one cannot thrive in the kingdom of God. Let's study together...

Discussion:

I. Beware of False Prophets (Matthew 7:15)

Who can lead us astray? How can you spot a false prophet? False teacher?

What else does the Bible say about this subject (**Deuteronomy 13:1 -3, Romans 16:17, II Corinthians 11:13-15, II Peter 2:1-3, I John 2:26-27, 4:1-6, II John 7-11, Jude 3-4**)?

How can we arm ourselves and be prepared for false teaching (**Ephesians 5:11, 6:10-20, I Timothy 6:3-5, II Timothy 3:5, 4:3-4**)?

Whom did Paul urged to be prepared to handle this danger (**Acts 20:28-31**)?

How can we be sure something is false if we do not search the Scriptures first (**Acts 17:11, II Timothy 3:16-17**)?

Just because something is new, different, or opposite of my own opinions, doesn't make it wrong? What did the early Christians do on difficult issues (**Acts 1,2,4,6,12,15,17,20,etc.**)?

Can we treat everyone the same? Should we treat immature brethren differently from those who are willingly, maliciously, and wickedly teaching false doctrine? Explain.

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II. Beware of Bad Fruit (Matthew 7:16-20)

What are the identifying marks of a false teacher? How can their actions be as valuable (if not more so) than their words?

Some teachers may look innocent, and even use religious language to sound spiritual, but what will allow us to discern the truth?

What can we learn from fruit (**John 15:1-8, Galatians 5:22-23, Mark 11:12-20**)?

How can we be fruit inspectors without being a judge (**Matthew 7:1-6, James 1:22**)?

What does it say about a person if they are covetous and immoral (**II Peter 2:14-15**)?

What does it say about a person if they are teaching opinions and traditions that are not in harmony with Scripture (**I John 4:5-6**)?

III. Beware of Poor Decision Making (Matthew 7:21-23)

How can we know that salvation is not for those who simply profess the name of Jesus in faith?

Why do many denominations embrace confession the name of Christ only, praying in the name of Jesus, or saying the sinner's prayer alone, for the purpose of salvation?

How can we know that salvation is not for those who try to work their way into heaven?

Why do many denominations embrace good works, yet neglect teaching about grace?

Can preaching the gospel, prophesying the truth, performing wonders, and casting out demons, guarantee eternal life? Explain.

How will Jesus respond to those who emphasize only faith or only works (**James 2:14-26**)?

Conclusion: Jesus is clearly stressing the point of obedience. We cannot just confess Jesus's name, and have faith in Him. We must have a living and active faith. We must walk with Him daily. Let's become the kingdom of God and live the Sermon on the Mount!

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Pitfall #12 = Building a Weak Foundation (Matthew 7:24-27)

Introduction: We are studying one of the greatest sermons ever preached called the "Sermon on the Mount" (**Matthew 5-7**). We have noticed 12 pitfalls facing the kingdom of God. If we want to live the "Sermon on the Mount," and become the kingdom of God, we need to avoid these pitfalls. In this last lesson we will focus on the final pitfall which is building on a weak foundation.

When we build upon anything other than the words of Christ, we are building on a weak foundation that is destined to crumble. Jesus challenges those present to hear & obey God's word. To avoid the pitfalls in life, keep your eyes on Jesus! Listen to his teachings! Jesus concluded His sermon with a great illustration about a wise man and a foolish man. Which are you? Let's study together...

Discussion:

I. The Wise Man (Matthew 7:24-25)

Jesus repeatedly emphasized that there are only two ways to respond to His words. There are two gates (vs.13-14), two roads (vs.13-14), two destinations (vs.13-14), two fruits (vs.16-18), two trees (vs.16-18), and two builders (vs.24-27). Which sounds more appealing?

What can we learn from the first builder?

Why does Jesus warn us that faith alone will not suffice (**Matthew 7:21**)?

Why does Jesus command action and obedience (**Matthew 7:22**)?

II. The Foolish Man (Matthew 7:26-27)

What can we learn from the second builder?

How can hearing the word and not doing the word be dangerous and deadly (**James 1:22**)?

Jesus often quoted the prophet Isaiah who was told to preach even though the people would be unwilling to hear it (**Isaiah 6**). Therefore, Jesus warns people to hear His words (**Matthew 11:5, 13:3, 13: 9, 13:43, Mark 4:9, 4:23, 4:33, 7:16, 8:8, 14:35, Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22**). How could anyone hear His words and not act upon it?

What can we learn about the rain, floods, wind, and storms (**Matthew 5:45**)?

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III. The Freedom To Choose (Matthew 7:28-29)

What is Jesus looking for in His disciples (**Matthew 7:24, 25:31-46**)?

What are the dangers of trusting works to save us?

What are the dangers of simple sincerity without action?

Do you think some people only followed Jesus because they were astonished at His teaching or because they were astonished at His miracles? Explain.

Do you think some people only followed Jesus because they were impressed with His authority over the scribes, religious leaders, and even over the demons? Explain.

How can we know that Jesus wants a personal relationship with us? How can we know that He wants us saved, attentive, and active?

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus did not quote other rabbis, He doesn't even reference the prophets by name (only mentions Solomon). Therefore, the people recognized that He had direct authority (**Matthew 5:18, 28, 44**). What did they do with that information?

Previous to this final story, Jesus teaches that He will be the Judge of all mankind on the Judgment Day (**Matthew 7:21-23**). What does that tell us about His authority in eternity?

What will Jesus say to those who are given eternal life (**Matthew 26:34**)?

How does this story contribute to the overall theme of Matthew (**Matthew 1:1, 28:18-20**)?

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Conclusion: Each of us should be challenged as we read through the Sermon on the Mount! No doubt, it was and is the will of Christ Jesus that we avoid these pitfalls. He battled His entire ministry with religious people who suffered from unbelief. They were suffering from spiritual decay from within. In many respects we suffer from the same things in the church today. It would be wise for us to return to the simple teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. Let's study it and apply it! Let's become the kingdom of God and live the Sermon on the Mount!