

BIBLE  
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FOR LIFE

# DISCIPLE-MAKING FRAMEWORK



*Excerpt from Among Wolves*  
by Dhati Lewis

*Chapter 5*

# MOVEMENT #4 (PART 1)

FRAMING DISCIPLE-MAKING

Disciple-making is not *a* ministry of the church; it is *the* ministry of the church. Matthew 4:17–22 is the key text for the next movement.

The passage reads:

*From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*



Matthew 4:17 starts out saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repentance is key here and involves many different factors. One element of repentance is a deep grief over sinfulness. If you are not grieved by your sin, you need to question whether or not you are a Christian because a Christian's life is marked by repentance. If you continue to boast and brag about your sin in the same way you always have, then your life is not marked by repentance. Once we

change the way we see sin, we must secondly, renounce sin—turn from it. We no longer want to do things that grieve the heart of God.

Some would characterize this renouncing as sorrow, but it is more than remorse. When we renounce our sin, yes we are sad. But the sadness compels us to turn away from the sin and move closer to our holy God. Once we turn from our sin, we must, finally, forsake sin. Truly turning from our sin involves a sense of desperation. We cannot turn and forsake our sin unless we are desperate and dependent on the Lord. Why is turning and forsaking our sin crucial to Jesus' ministry? He answers this question in the second half of the sentence: because the kingdom of heaven is near.

Repentance also has another layer to it. The core of repentance means to change. Many times we only think about repentance in a negative way. We think of repentance when we have obvious sin in our lives and we need to turn from that sin. But really, the core of repentance is to change the way you see things. Jesus is introducing a new reality and vision for the kingdom of heaven and calling us to change the way we see it because the kingdom is at hand.

George Ladd, in *Theology of the New Testament*, defines *kingdom* as the dynamic reign or kingly rule of God based on a sphere in which the rule is experienced.<sup>1</sup> While there are many views on what the kingdom is, I will only elaborate on three. The first view promotes the belief that the kingdom of God is the church and Jesus, who is head of the kingdom, rules over both the government and the church. The second view states that the kingdom of heaven is entirely futuristic; that we cannot, as the church, experience this kingdom that is to come. The third explains the kingdom of God as a both/and; "already, but not yet." There is a close

resemblance between the church and the kingdom of God, but they are also utterly distinct. All three views can be found in different church traditions, and with differing points of merit, according to their points of emphasis. But it is important to clarify your definition of kingdom, because it is so central to the New Testament and Jesus' primary message while ministering on earth.

Notice that Matthew 4:17 does not say that the church is here. No, it says the kingdom of heaven is near. The church is a dim and poor reflection of the kingdom of heaven, which has yet to come fully. When the world sees the church, our desire is for them to say that while we are not a perfect people, we really love each other; we are a family. The church is God's way of showing the world what is yet to come—a family that loves one another perfectly. This is the hope of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul, the author, reveals that one day, faith and hope will not be needed because Christ will be with us again. But love will last forever!

When Jesus starts His ministry by proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," yes, He was saying that we must see our sins differently because we offend a holy God. But repentance is about more than our justification; it is a core component of our ongoing sanctification. It is a central component of the church's ongoing march against the enemy. God wants the world to see this family, His church, taking sin seriously, loving one another, and changing the way they see the world based on the truths of Scripture. The picture we give the world will be a poor, dim reflection of the kingdom to come, but our love for one another stirs in us hope for the day when we will love one another perfectly.

Ongoing repentance is a core component of establishing a disciple-making culture. Without it, ego and pride can too easily corrupt the love of the community. But



let's get even more practical. If establishing a disciple-making culture was the cornerstone of Jesus' ministry, how exactly do we accomplish that?

## HOW TO DEFINE DISCIPLESHIP

To begin, let's start with a clear understanding of discipleship. I define *discipleship* as our *capacity to lovingly transmit and embody the life of Jesus through the life of His followers*.

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### ***Our Capacity—the Me and We***

There are a few keywords in this definition I don't want you to miss. First, let's look at the phrase, *our capacity*.

There is a need to recognize that the conduit of disciple-making is the local church—the dim reflection of the kingdom of heaven. Whether you are a small group leader, missional community leader, ministry leader, or pastor—if you are mobilizing or gathering a group of people—you must rely on the local church in

order to disciple! One must understand that it's both the *me* and the *we* for which we are responsible.

The first track to ponder is *your* life on mission—the *me*. We do this part well because of our American individualism. We can understand and begin to live out “my life on mission.”

But the problem is that we too easily lose our corporate identity; the church's life on mission—the *we*. We tend to forget that God gave us our time, our talents, and our treasures in order to complete a missing link within the larger whole. It is our role to identify and recognize responsibilities of both our life and the church's life.

Any time you are mobilizing a group of people, you have to see it from both vantage points. Discipleship must be *our* capacity, not an individual effort. If, for instance, I was the only parent raising our children, we would have a bunch of bold, generous, and passionate kids without any discipline or structure to make it purposeful. It is when they are introduced to the *we* that they get Angie's discipline, order, kindness, and radical sacrifice. And, if Angie and I try to raise our children with only our individual capacities, they miss out on the others within the local body that can teach them trust, compassion, justice, and forgiveness. My underlying assumption when it comes to discipleship comes from an adaptation of an old African proverb:

*My foundational belief is that if it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a church to raise a Christian.*

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## **Lovingly**

Another key word in the definition is *lovingly*. We are to lovingly embody the person and work of Jesus. We have to understand the means and the goal of discipleship. The Bible says the world will know you because of your love for one another (John 13:35). We transmit the gospel through love. In order to understand this, we need to understand the very foundation of sin. Sin is not simply breaking a moral code—it is a violation of LOVE. Sin is a violation of relationship. Jesus was asked, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:36–40).

Sin is anything that tears apart those relationships; it is not necessarily a defined act. For example, if I see my son hitting his brother, is that sin? Don't be too quick to assume that it is. It is all according to the heart and the context. Unfortunately, we tend to focus on behaviors and try to get kids away from certain behaviors, but that produces behavior modification instead of worldview transformation. In my example, the issue isn't necessarily hitting. If my son is choking on something, I want his brother to hit him on his back. The activity of hitting isn't sinful. If I am yelling at my kids, is that a sin? No. If they're about to get hit by a car, you want me to yell at them. In that situation, the most loving thing I can do is yell. The behavior is not the problem. We focus on the behaviors much more than the heart. God has said, “The world will know you are My disciples because of your love for one another” (John 13:35, author paraphrase). He is not looking for inauthentic outward obedience; instead, He is looking for an inwardly conformed, loving people.

## ***Transmit and Embody the Person and Work of Christ***

The next point of emphasis is that we are to embody the person and work of Christ. He is the substance. When we talk about the gospel, you can say gospel this, gospel that—gospel, gospel, gospel. But I find that people don't really understand what the gospel is.

Think about this. In a car, you've got Park, Reverse, and Drive labels on the gears. We know that when you put the car in D it goes forward and when you put it in R it goes backward, but the average citizen doesn't really know how the engine works. The same can be true about the gospel. When we talk about being gospel-centered, we don't really understand what that means. We understand what it means in justification (the one-time event when the Lord justifies your soul by purchasing your debt), but we don't know what Scripture means in sanctification (the process of growing to look more and more like Jesus). We get saved by grace. But we try to maintain it by the law. Paul addresses this very issue in Galatians when he writes,

*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Gal. 3:1–3)*

We are trying to transmit the person and work of Christ to others. That's the goal of discipleship to be the embodiment of what Christ looks and acts like and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, transfer that into the lives of others. This

task is daunting, but we can find great comfort in that Scripture has given us a clear picture of who Christ is. We no longer have to imagine what God looks like or who He is because like Colossians 1:19 states, the fullness of God dwells in Christ. All we have to do is look at Christ. When we look at Christ, we see the type of people God wants us to be. And when people look at us, they should see Christ embodied in our actions.

### ***Impartation into the Lives of Others***

The last component of the definition is impartation into the lives of others. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus invited His disciples into relationship and then challenged them to change. “And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’” There is an invitation to walk with Him. There is an invitation to relationship. When you are called to come and follow, the assumption is you will be walking together, doing life together. The invitation is for relationship, but there’s also a challenge to change. In following Christ, He says He will make us become fishers of men. In the Scripture, the disciples did not start as fishers of men, Jesus was making them into something new. When you are involved in disciple-making, you should assume you will be changed.



In his book *Building a Discipling Culture*, Mike Breen says, “No one accidentally creates disciples. Discipleship is an intentional pursuit.”<sup>2</sup> No one accidentally does this. It’s not something that comes by osmosis. There needs to be intentionality.

In Matthew 4:18–22 Jesus invites these brothers into a relationship with Him—into a family. Jesus called these men saying, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (v. 19). Jesus challenges these men to enter into relationship with Him and He challenges them to change. Too many times our churches will invite people to do one or the other—choosing between relationship and change. If we invite people only into relationship, we end up having a social club. If we only invite them to change, then we end up with a judgmental, critical group of people characterized by their condemnation of the actions and character of others. Developing a discipleship-making culture involves both relationship *and* change.

This blend of invitation and challenge is something that might be easier to think about in terms of a parent-child relationship. David Mathis writes,

*Beneath every manifestation of sin and rebellion in our children is some God-created good to affirm. Which means that pointed moments of discipline are not only opportunities to correct our children, but to connect with them. Our hardest times as parents are not just occasions to identify and punish the depravity in our children, but opportunities to identify and encourage their dignity. To parent their hearts, not only their behavior.<sup>3</sup>*

A parent does not want their child to simply act the part and behave well without any heart involvement (no invitation/relationship) or to be completely spoiled

without any behavior checks (no challenge). The goal here is balance. Mathis explains it as correction and connection.

It is the same idea that runs through this passage as Jesus invites these men into relationship (connection) while simultaneously challenging them to change (correction). These men knew what He was asking them to do—leave their occupations, their families, their livelihoods. Yet, their response was to follow Jesus swiftly and joyfully with great expectation.

Similarly, this is why membership at Blueprint Church is a call to discipleship. We are inviting people into a family called the church. And once you are a part of this family, you will be invited to change and look more like Jesus. We want you to be known by those in your family, which we accomplish through our missional communities. We want every member to be fully in—not two-thirds in, but all the way committed to relationship. When you commit to being in a missional community, you are committing to three things: gospel, family, and mission. You are committing to a group of people who will grow in the gospel, in the context of family, while living on mission. We invite individuals into relationship and challenge them to change—this is disciple-making in our church.

## **FOUR MAIN COMPONENTS OF DISCIPLESHIP**

### ***Life-on-Life***

Instead, I argue that there are four main components of biblical discipleship: life-on-life, theological training, leadership development, and mobilization.



There are four critical things for which every family of faith must wrestle. The first is life-on-life discipleship. Jesus said, “Follow me.” At the very outset of His call, it was an invitation into relationship with Him.

If you were in relationship with me personally, you would not just see me in the capacity of mentorship—where I teach you something and ask you what you think. No. Instead, you would see me interacting with my daughters, you would see me handle an argument, you would see me bless the homeless, you would observe me handling my responsibilities, you would watch me in my weakness and strength. Many of us, however, have reduced discipleship to mentorship. Discipleship is not simply a

one-on-one appointment twice a month with someone who is more mature in their faith.

When Angie and I were convicted early in our ministry about the importance of holistic discipleship instead of lopsided mentorship, we began to look for practical ways to change our ministry. This is when we first committed to tangibly using our home as a way to invite people into our lives. For most of our marriage, we have had people living in our home. And what we’ve learned is that it was an invitation into our lives. Instead of picking up the latest book and curriculum to study with others, we decided that our life would be our curriculum. In any community,

individually and corporately, we must wrestle with the question: How are we cultivating life-on-life discipleship in our context? Inviting others to live with you is not the only way for life-on-life discipleship to occur. But for our church family, it has proved to be a vibrant and sustainable way to promote holistic discipleship.

It takes a whole church to raise a Christian. We cannot think of the church as an orphanage and create a culture of discipleship around that. Producing disciples takes a family. When someone asks you, “Are you your brother’s keeper?” your response should be a resounding, “Yes!” Discipleship is a corporate endeavor; it cannot be done individually. You are absolutely responsible for the growth of your brother. There is no such thing as a healthy you if your church is unhealthy. That would be like saying I have cancer in my lungs, but my toes are as healthy as can be. Discipleship is not a meeting. It is not mentorship. It is not me teaching you what I know. It is not going through the latest Christian self-help book together. If this is discipleship, you will not find it in the Scriptures!

### ***Theological Training: Gospel Fluency***

The second thing to wrestle with is theological training. How are we both lovingly embodying and transferring the person and work of Christ? When I talk about theological training, I’m not just talking about being better at Bible trivia. I’m talking about sitting at the feet of our Maker and understanding both who He is and what He’s done for us. How are we cultivating a gospel-centered people where people are more fluent in the gospel, and their identity is more rooted in the person and work of Christ?

When we talk about this idea of being gospel fluent, it’s the same as being fluent in any language. Take Spanish, for example. A lot of times people ask you, “¿Hablas

español?” For people who understand a little Spanish, they often respond, “Hablo muy poquito.” They are saying I understand the basics like “hello” and “how are you?” They can probably respond and say, “Fine, and you?” But if the person continues in Spanish, we may cut them off and say, “Oh no. *Muy poquito.*” This is the same thing we often have with the gospel. We think about the gospel in a way that applies to the afterlife, but we don’t have a gospel for the everyday. So we know what happens when we die; we just don’t know what happens in the everyday. We don’t have a gospel for today. We only know *very little* of the gospel. Theological training is teaching how to understand the person and work of Christ in light of our everyday. How can we become more fluent in the gospel and more rooted in our individual and corporate identity?

## ***Leadership Development***

The third key to wrestle with is leadership development. How are we raising up and developing leaders in our church? Jesus says, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). This comparison of giving someone fish to eat versus teaching that person *how* to fish is critical. In a lot of our discipleship relationships, we give people fish, but we never teach them how to fish. This produces a perpetual dependency on the person giving the fish. That’s why we believe in worldview transformation instead of behavior modification. Behavior modification is me getting you to change your behavior because I said so. Worldview transformation is me helping to change your opinion about something and causing you to see it differently. For instance, I can tell you that you should never eat fried food (behavior modification) and you may listen to me and cut it out of your diet for a long time. However, if I teach you about what fried food does to your body and how the grease slowly clogs up your arteries, your view of

fried food will shift and you will want less of it because you understand its effects. When we are training someone through a discipleship relationship, leadership development should be a huge facet.

Practically, how do we take a person from a new believer to someone who could be an elder? Our aim isn't for everyone to seek the position of an elder, but rather to strive for elder-like qualities because our ultimate goal is always to look more like our Shepherd. This should be our aim. What we have to do is think through the easy, obvious, and strategic steps for greater maturity and growth. In disciple-making, we do this by giving people age-specific responsibilities. All of my children have chores—they have had them since the age of two. When Dhati Jr. was three years old, we gave him the responsibility of setting the table. At dinnertime, we would put plates in his hands and walk with him to ensure he didn't drop and break a plate. One by one we would walk back and forth with him as he completed his job. It would have been easier and faster to set the table without him. But there was a greater goal than just getting the chore complete. We wanted to teach him responsibility. This is a family, not an orphanage—we needed him to grasp that. This is the same with discipleship within your church; we have to give age-specific responsibilities to help foster an understanding that all believers are to be responsible members of the family. For my son, over the course of time, we increased his responsibilities. As he grew older, taller, and stronger, he was able to handle more. (Now, at age nine, he cooks us breakfast!) In the same way, Jesus calls His disciples to become responsible family members. We don't need to just give fish away; we must teach others to become fishermen.

## **Mobilization**

Finally, the fourth component to think through is mobilization. Mission is a critical tool for sanctification. As we frame disciple-making, we need to get our people on mission. One of my first pastors, Tom Nelson, used to say, “Never teach a person the Bible without having them share their faith. If you teach without sharing, you’ll produce arrogance. Because the only people who care about how much you know is other believers. But when you go out and share your faith, you realize ministry is not based on how much you know but you rely on a supernatural act of God to bring people to saving faith. This realization produces humility.” If we want to be a part of making disciples who exemplify the humility of Christ, we must mobilize them to witness and reproduce the life-on-life discipleship they experience.

## **CONCLUSION**

Making disciples is not optional for Christ followers. When Jesus left His followers on earth, He left them with a mission to carry on in His absence, and that mission was centered around disciple-making. Churches ought to be villages raising Christians. *Discipleship*, then, is our capacity to lovingly transmit and embody the life of Jesus through the life of His followers. It could also be said that it is our obedience to Christ’s final command to His followers. Next, we will turn our attention to the Sermon on the Mount.

*Chapter 6*

# MOVEMENT #4 (PART 2)

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE  
SERMON ON THE MOUNT

God's calling is one of abundant life. The call for anyone seeking to follow Jesus is to first deny himself, take up his cross, and then follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24). In reality, this call is not a call for you to lose anything; instead, it is a call for you to gain everything. The idolatry that runs rampant in our hearts can cause us to fall asleep to the things of God and the work He desires to do in and through us.

I'll never forget when I was in Honduras about ten years ago. We were there working with an indigenous people group and had made friends with the only other Americans in the town. I felt like we were really roughing it out there in the rain forest—no AC, sporadic electricity, limited running waters, and an outhouse with roaches and worms.

We had been to Honduras multiple times, so I had grown accustomed to the elements and had even gotten used to a different level of exposure to wildlife. During church services, bats would frequently fly above our heads. Moths were the size of my palm, large spiders frequented my room, and mosquitos were ten times the size of the ones in the States. But on this particular night, I was not prepared. We joined Roger and Katrina, our American friends, at their home by the water; Monopoly was on the agenda. As we were playing, I saw a rat scurry across the ceiling beam. I looked around, waiting for someone else to respond or react. But, it was like no one else saw the rat.

So I tried to tell myself to keep it cool, be tough like a missionary, and just push past it. A few minutes went by when I saw another rat. And then, a little while later, I saw a third rat. At this point, I hit my limit. I jumped up and said, "Does anyone else see this? There are rats in here!" The missionaries looked at me and began to laugh. I tried to explain to the missionaries that I am not used to seeing rats like this, but

they continued laughing. I was so serious, but they couldn't stop laughing. And then, one of the women started laughing hysterically, and she just slumped over and passed out.

I was standing there like, "What in the world is going on here?!" She woke up for a minute, only to pass out again. They were used to the rats and thought my response was hilarious. Well, if this moment wasn't strange enough, it got better.

I looked at her husband and he just kept laughing. Fearful, I wondered if he realized his wife had just passed out. I was freaking out! It was in that moment her husband finally explained that I had just come face-to-face with a real example of narcolepsy. Before that experience, I used to think that narcolepsy was just a condition that made someone sleep too much; I had accused my best friend of having it many times. (I know, you're wondering what this has to do with the story, but just hang with me.) For those of you, like me, who may not know what real narcolepsy is, the formal definition is "a condition characterized by extreme tendency to fall asleep when in relaxing surroundings or during extreme emotions."

Okay, so back to the story. There were rats everywhere. This woman kept falling in and out of consciousness. And I felt like I needed to get out of there quickly before something else crazy happened. So we finished the game and they walked us home. Although they thought our response was funny, they told us the next day that they noticed more rats than usual that night. After laying out traps, in the course of one night, they caught *thirty-three* rats—in their *house*. I was shocked and dumbfounded.

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They referred back to that night countless times, and the more time spent with them, the more we saw Katrina’s narcoleptic episodes. Sometimes it was from extreme relaxation, and other times it was because of extreme emotional conditions—anger toward her husband, happiness about a joke, frustration with the government for not getting the paperwork to approve a child’s operation—I saw it many more times.

What’s interesting is that many of us can go through our Christian lives with spiritual narcolepsy. In Matthew, Jesus is calling out to a group of spiritually narcoleptic people. They have been falling asleep. They became so accustomed to their spiritual condition (sin) that they relaxed and fell asleep. At the same time, others just as easily fell asleep when confronted with an intense conviction of an issue—they are numb to it. And when these individuals were asleep, they were not responding to the things of God—they were unable to do so.

The book of Malachi ends with a charge to God’s people to repent and turn back to the Lord. The people of Malachi’s time agreed to repent, but then they did not turn their hearts back to the Lord. Unfortunately, because of the lack of repentance, God’s people experienced a silent era. For four hundred years, God went silent.



Four hundred years—that’s multiple generations without a prophet to speak, multiple generations without men of God proclaiming His greatness, multiple generations where there was no vision for the people. We recognize that where there is no vision, the people perish—Scripture tells us that (see Prov. 29:18). And we see a great example of the fact that when relationship and communication with God ceases, religious legalism emerges.

Have you ever wondered how we got from the Old Testament worship of God as outlined in the law to the New Testament religious sects? These religious practices seemed to come out of nowhere! But it was during the time of silence that the people started to create their own laws<sup>4</sup>—“Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint” (Prov. 29:18). In Matthew, the Pharisees and Sadducees appear, and then the Maccabees and the Zealots. We see all these religious groups coming together and trying to work their way up to God. Their mind-set is, “If God isn’t going to raise up a leader, we will do it ourselves.” But God raises up John the Baptist to call the religious back to the Father. And can you guess what John’s message is?

*“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matt. 3:2, author emphasis).

## **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

God is calling His people to wake up out of their narcoleptic state, and He is calling them to repent because the kingdom of heaven is at hand. But in order for us to understand the call of Sermon on the Mount and properly apply it, we must first understand the context, then we must posture our hearts in humility, and then finally, we must identify our proper response.

As we aim to understand the context of the Sermon on the Mount, let's take a look back a few chapters before it happened. In Matthew 3, the author describes the baptism of Jesus. In Matthew 4, God leads Jesus into the wilderness, He is tempted three times, and He comes out of temptation through dependence upon God's Word and resistance to the lies of the devil. He then immediately initiates His ministry. From the very start, Jesus repeats the same message as John the Baptist—the message that God is calling us to renounce our former way of life and focus more on the inner issues of the heart in order to fall more in love with God and more in love with one another.

Picking up in Matthew 4:23, we read, "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people." Here Jesus is giving a tangible expression of what the kingdom will be like in its fullest expression. There will be no death, no sickness, no tears, and we will all be healed. He is giving a firsthand experience of "already, but not yet." But, first, He wants His followers to understand that His kingdom is not about outward things; it's not just about changing the external things and practices in life—the healing, the comforts, etc. The number-one thing God is looking for is a changed heart. That's His aim. The problem is that too many of us, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, are too busy looking at the outward things and end up missing the whole point.

So Jesus continues preaching the kingdom and then we come to this part in Matthew 5: "Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him" (v. 1). First of all, it's important to note that if Jesus was healing people in every town He entered, He was surely drawing a crowd. But it is critical for us to realize that the target audience of the Sermon on the Mount



is not primarily the masses who showed up hoping for a miracle. The focus is on His disciples. The message is for God's people—those who He is calling out, those who have trusted in Him, those who are willing to take up their cross, deny themselves, and follow Him. As Jesus starts His teaching, He begins with the Beatitudes.

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt. 5:3–12)*

The point in this section is not to unpack each individual beatitude, but to look at the Beatitudes as a whole to understand the framework with which we should approach the Sermon on the Mount. Many scholars believe that you shouldn't look at the Sermon on the Mount until you come to grips with the Beatitudes. The reason for this is that within these Scriptures lies a heart posture that God is calling His people to live with.

First, the Sermon on the Mount calls God's people to identify with blessedness. What does it mean to be blessed? To be blessed is to be happy. But this is not a circumstantial happiness. It is a happiness coming from the experience of God's divine favor. Jesus is making it very clear, the "secret" to happiness, to experiencing blessing, is not a secret. Those who have a heart posture that is poor in spirit, meek, merciful, and tender to the Lord, these are the people who experience the blessing and favor of God.

This emphasis on the position of our hearts is continued throughout the entire Sermon on the Mount. Later on Jesus says,

*"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. . . . You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28)*

"Hmpff.  


I'm Not  
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snacks."

That's why

BIBLE  
STUDIES  
FOR LIFE

is built on the  
10 concepts  
I need to  
grow in  
God's Word."

BIBLE  
STUDIES  
FOR LIFE



Jesus takes the laws we think we've mastered because we haven't murdered or committed adultery, and He attacks the heart of the issue. Just because you might be a little bit better at masking what's in your heart, doesn't mean you don't have an issue. The problem is not simply what you're doing. The problem is who you are—a sinner. That is what separates you from God. As we see this problem, our only response is a position and posture of poverty, to come before the Lord and say, "I am poor. I am bankrupt. There's no way in the world I can do or live up to any of this. All I can do is put myself in a posture where You can work in my life. Will You empower me through Your Spirit to live and do the very things that I'm called to do?"

*Jesus is after our hearts, not our behavior.*

Jesus ends the first and last beatitude with the statement, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Recognize here that this blessing of receiving the kingdom does not come from what these people are *doing*, but from the posture of their hearts toward a God who has done everything on our behalf. This is why Paul writes in Philippians 3:8–9, "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith." There is only one hero in all of the Sermon on the Mount, and it's not you and it's certainly not me. The only hero is Jesus Christ, God Himself. At the very beginning of this passage, by healing every sickness and disease (Matt. 4:23–24), Jesus is displaying the total authority that has been given to Him. And at the end, the response of the people

is, “We have never seen someone with such authority” (Matt. 7:28–29, author paraphrase).

God is establishing a new kingdom and is bidding us to come and join Him. But the kingdom is not about you or me; it’s about Him. He calls us to come and posture our hearts toward Him. He calls us to recognize and identify with blessedness. He calls us to understand what it means to establish a kingdom built on a posture of repentance; He changes our view of Himself. We should see Him higher and more lifted up than ever before as we give Him the authority that’s due His name.



The Sermon on the Mount is where we see the charge for followers of Jesus to initiate the new kingdom experience through radical inward change. This type of transformation becomes a reflection of the fullness of the kingdom that is to come, providing the world with an opportunity to experience the kingdom of God in its “already, but not yet” state. All the while, we are to hold high the work of Christ and look toward the day when He will transform our imperfect reflection into a glorious reality.

# ABOUT THIS EBOOK

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# NOTES

1. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 109.
2. Mike Breen and Steve Cockram, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2011), 20, iBooks.
3. See <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/good-parents-connect-not-just-correct>.
4. Max Anders, *30 Days to Understanding the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 94.