

MATTHEW

The Sermon on the Mount



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**EXPLORE THE BIBLE: Matthew—
The Sermon on the Mount**
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▶ ABOUT THIS STUDY

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO LIVE EACH DAY AS PART OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

It's easy to feel that your spiritual life and your practical, day-to-day life are two distinct things. But what if it all blends together into one beautifully unexpected lifestyle in the kingdom of heaven?

Jesus turned over everyone's neat little categories and shattered the traditional understanding of religious teaching. Two opposite extremes had missed the point of a relationship with God. On the one hand, hypocrites used religious activity to build up their own reputations. On the other hand, people genuinely seeking to please God were subject to a burdensome list of rules. But with an authority unlike anyone the crowds had ever heard—and truly unlike any man in history—Jesus intrigued everyone on the mountainside as he described a practical spirituality with surprising implications.

Explore the Bible: Matthew—The Sermon on the Mount reveals with absolute clarity what it means to live each day on earth as part of the kingdom of heaven. This Bible study encourages us to trust in and respond to the loving authority of our Heavenly Father. As part of His kingdom, we bear a family resemblance, reflecting His character throughout the world. Everything we do matters, and the heart motivating our actions is equally important.

The *Explore the Bible* series will help you know and apply the encouraging and empowering truth of God's Word. Each session is organized in the following way.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT: This page explains the original context of each passage and begins relating the primary themes to your life today.

EXPLORE THE TEXT: These pages walk you through Scripture, providing helpful commentary and encouraging thoughtful interaction with God through His Word.

OBEY THE TEXT: This page helps you apply the truths you've explored. It's not enough to know what the Bible says. God's Word has the power to change your life.

LEADER GUIDE: This final section provides optional discussion starters and suggested questions to help anyone lead a group in reviewing each section of the personal study.



For helps on how to use *Explore the Bible*, tips on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading, visit:
www.ministrygrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible.

➤ GROUP COMMITMENT

As you begin this study, it's important that everyone agrees to key group values. Clearly establishing the purpose of your time together will foster healthy expectations and help ease any uncertainties. The goal is to ensure that everyone has a positive experience leading to spiritual growth and true community. Initial each value as you discuss the following with your group.

PRIORITY

Life is busy, but we value this time with one another and with God's Word. We choose to make being together a priority.

PARTICIPATION

We're a group. Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one dominates.

RESPECT

Everyone is given the right to his or her own opinions. All questions are encouraged and respected.

TRUST

Each person humbly seeks truth through time in prayer and in the Bible. We trust God as the loving authority in our lives.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Anything said in our meetings is never repeated outside the group without the permission of everyone involved. This commitment is vital in creating an environment of trust and openness.

SUPPORT

Everyone can count on anyone in this group. Permission is given to call on one another at any time, especially in times of crisis. The group provides care for every member.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We agree to let the members of our group hold us accountable to commitments we make in the loving ways we decide on. Questions are always welcome. Unsolicited advice, however, isn't permitted.

I agree to all the commitments.

Date

➤ GENERAL EDITOR



Gregg Matte has served as the pastor of Houston's First Baptist Church since 2004. Prior to that, he served as the founder, speaker, and director of Breakaway Ministries at Texas A&M University, one of the largest college Bible studies in the nation. What started as a Bible study with 12 participants grew to a weekly gathering of more than 4,000 students.

Gregg is the author of *The Highest Education: Becoming a Godly Man*; *Finding God's Will: Seek Him, Know Him, Take The Next Step*; and *I AM Changes Who I Am: Who Jesus Is Changes Who I Am, What Jesus Does Changes What I Am to Do*.

Gregg is also a popular speaker at conferences, camps, and retreats across North America. Gregg and his wife, Kelly, have a son, Greyson.



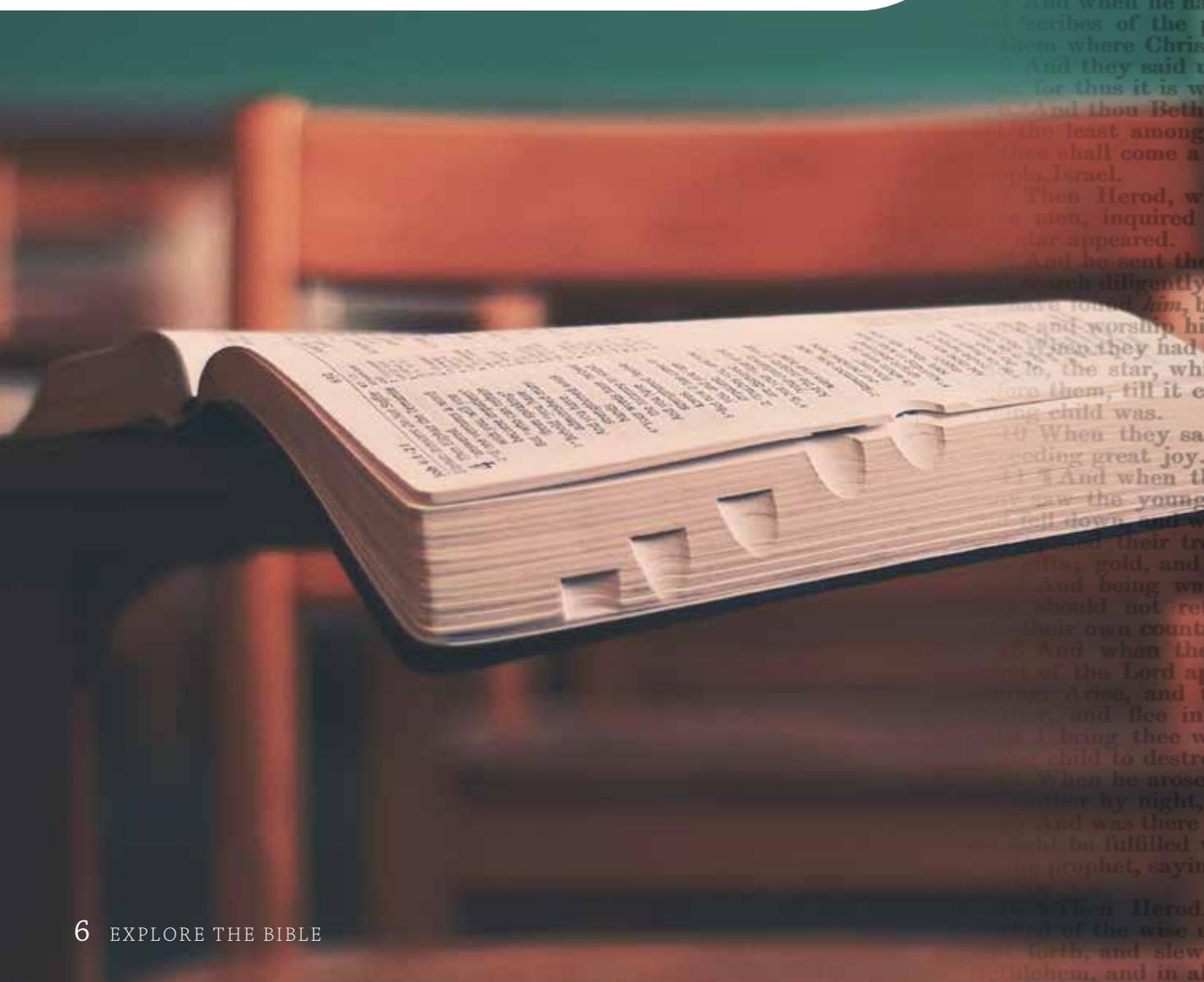
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➤ CONTENTS

Session 1	The Beatitudes (<i>Matt. 5:1-12</i>)	6
Session 2	Salt, Light, & Fruit (<i>Matt. 5:13-16; 7:15-20</i>)	16
Session 3	Fulfilling the Law (<i>Matt. 5:17-22,43-48</i>)	26
Session 4	How to Give, Pray, & Fast (<i>Matt. 6:1-18</i>)	36
Session 5	Earthly & Eternal Concerns (<i>Matt. 6:19-34</i>)	46
Session 6	Two Gates, Roads, & Foundations (<i>Matt. 7:13-14,21-29</i>)	56
Leader Guide	66
Tips for Leading a Group	78

THE BEATITUDES

Blessings in the kingdom of heaven are reflected in radically countercultural lives today.



➤ ABOUT THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Matthew is the opening book of the New Testament. As such, it is a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. The significance of this fact runs much deeper than mere placement. The Book of Matthew connects with the Old Testament through frequent references to events that are said to fulfill Old Testament promises and prophecies. Matthew's characteristic formula ("All this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet") occurs in the opening chapter (1:22) and appears repeatedly. Matthew includes as many as 61 quotations from the Old Testament, about twice that of any other Gospel.

AUTHOR

Although his identity is not disclosed within the Gospel itself, the writer has historically been identified as Matthew (also known as Levi), one of Jesus' twelve disciples. In the earliest known manuscripts his name appeared in the title. Also, the writings of many early church fathers attribute the first Gospel to Matthew.

DATE

Gospel studies have generally agreed that Mark was the earliest of the four Gospels and that Matthew reflects a knowledge of Mark. This consensus suggests that the Matthew was written after Mark. A time of writing in the decade of the 60s would be reasonable.

PURPOSE

Like the other Gospels, Matthew isn't a chronological diary of Jesus' life and ministry. It's a witness to His mission and message. Therefore, events and teachings are arranged with the intent of bearing witness to God's good news brought by His Son. Matthew portrays Jesus as the promised Messiah and the long-awaited King of Israel. In short, in Matthew Jesus is the Messiah-King. This Gospel emphasizes the kingdom of heaven, with Jesus as its Messiah-King. With regard to Jewish sensitivity to using the name of God, Matthew refers to the kingdom only 5 times as the kingdom of God but 32 times as the kingdom of heaven.

"HAPPINESS IS NOT
A GOAL; IT IS A
BY-PRODUCT."
—Eleanor Roosevelt

➤ MATTHEW 5:1-12

1 When He saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. **2** Then He began to teach them, saying:

3 “The poor in spirit are blessed,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

4 Those who mourn are blessed,
for they will be comforted.

5 The gentle are blessed,
for they will inherit the earth.

6 Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
are blessed,
for they will be filled.

7 The merciful are blessed,
for they will be shown mercy.

8 The pure in heart are blessed,
for they will see God.

9 The peacemakers are blessed,
for they will be called sons of God.

10 Those who are persecuted for righteousness
are blessed,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

11 “You are blessed when they insult and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me. **12** Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Think About It

*Observe Jesus' repetition
of the word blessed.*

*Look for the way each
promise is related to the
characteristic identified.*

➤ UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GROUP TIME.

Religion in Jesus' day was a system of burdensome rules and regulations. The religious leaders, for the most part, were hypocritical and legalistic. Jesus' attitude toward the law of Moses was a refreshing change. He emphasized faithful, sincere obedience instead of a lifeless, ceremonial religion. Jesus sought to bring the focus back to the true messages of the Old Testament prophets recorded in the Scriptures.

Because of their religious leaders' false teachings, the people didn't understand that the ancient prophets were encouraging a heartfelt obedience to God's message and not merely a dutiful observance of laws and rituals.

Matthew 5–7 comprises what's referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. The first section of the sermon, probably the most familiar today, is known as the Beatitudes (see 5:3-10). These words captured the attention of Jesus' disciples and the crowds who were listening. What Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount demanded a response.

Jesus probably began the Sermon on the Mount while seated among His disciples and other followers on a hillside somewhere around the Sea of Galilee. In the Beatitudes Jesus identified His standards for His followers and promised blessings for those who exhibit His character. Thus, Jesus opened His sermon by telling the people how they could experience true happiness.





➤ EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE NEW MOSES (Matthew 5:1-2)

¹When He saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. ²Then He began to teach them, saying ...

Jesus showed compassion for the multitudes who followed Him. People flocked to Him from all levels of society. Among them were the physically sick, emotionally unstable, demon possessed, financially destitute, uneducated, and illiterate. Mingling with this motley crowd were those who were religiously influential and politically powerful. They had no idea that Jesus was the Son of God. But Jesus was different. By nature He was the essence of love, which, like a magnet, drew people to Him. Furthermore, He preached on His own authority, quoting no traditions or great rabbis for His sources. He was the new Moses and yet was totally different from that great lawgiver. Moses descended Mount Sinai with God's law and confronted the people with God's judgment because of their sins. Jesus delivered His message from a mountain, but He emphasized the reality of a loving God who was ready to forgive sin.

What are some characteristics of a speaker who makes you want to listen?

THE NEW BLESSINGS (*Matthew 5:3-12*)

³The poor in spirit are blessed,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

⁴Those who mourn are blessed,
for they will be comforted.

⁵The gentle are blessed,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
are blessed,
for they will be filled.

⁷The merciful are blessed,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸The pure in heart are blessed,
for they will see God.

⁹The peacemakers are blessed,
for they will be called sons of God.

¹⁰Those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

¹¹You are blessed when they insult and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me. ¹²Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Beatitudes with which Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount aren't multiple choice. Just as we don't pick and choose which fruit of the Spirit we'll adopt, we also don't select which Beatitudes we'll ask God to help us develop in our lives. The Beatitudes must be taken as a whole, describing the way God's people must live if they expect Christ to be seen in them.

The word *blessed*, which Jesus used with each Beatitude, can mean *happiness*. Typically, we think of happiness as an emotional response that's dependent on circumstances. Jesus' idea of happiness, however, is associated with the truth that God is at work in you at all times. Religion in Jesus' day wasn't associated with happiness in the lives of the people. Many people saw God as a divine Being who was poised to mete out judgment on sinful human beings. The people who heard Jesus preach and teach considered Him a rabbi, but He was in no

KEY DOCTRINE

Education

In Jesus Christ abide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

BIBLE SKILL

Notice repeated words or phrases in a Bible passage.

Jesus repeatedly used the word *blessed* in the Beatitudes (as you identified on p. 8). Other important parts of that repeated pattern are the word *are* and the phrase *will be*.

How do the present tense of *are blessed* and the future tense of *will be* help you understand what Jesus was teaching?

way like the rabbis who interpreted God's law to them. He began His preaching not with condemnation and a fearful anticipation of judgment to come but with a resounding theme of happiness. Again and again He repeated it. What Jesus preached was indeed good news.

In systematic order Jesus described eight character traits that identify true citizens of the kingdom of heaven. He began with the poor in spirit, those who are aware of their total need for God. True happiness comes when people realize they're spiritually bankrupt before God and must rely on His strength. God gladly gives the kingdom of heaven to those who come to Him in humility and faith.

Jesus' second Beatitude addressed the inescapable fact that sadness is going to be a part of life in this imperfect, sinful world. We mourn when we face great sorrow, experience a devastating tragedy, or are forced to accept failure—and the list of things that cause us to mourn is endless. This Beatitude, however, may refer to godly mourning, a true sorrow for our sins that leads to repentance. This kind of mourning brings the comfort of God's grace and forgiveness.

Gentleness was the third Beatitude. Meekness isn't weakness. This word implies humility and trust in God rather than a self-centered attitude. The earth Jesus said the gentle will inherit refers to the new heaven and new earth promised to believers (see Rev. 21:1).

In the fourth Beatitude Jesus implied that spiritual poverty leads to hunger and thirst for righteousness. God's gift of kingdom life is the only genuine satisfaction for those who yearn for true justice, personal righteousness, and salvation.

How are you tempted to make it on your own in certain areas of need rather than seeking God's help and provision?

Jesus' fifth Beatitude focused on mercy. The word *merciful* implies generosity, compassion, and forgiveness. Mercy is a part of God's nature. He forgives sin and shows kindness to the downtrodden. It's second nature for those who've experienced God's mercy to show the same mercy to others.

Purity of heart is the sixth Beatitude. This is single-minded devotion to God. It's the quality of those who are aware of their total need for God, mourn their spiritual poverty, and hunger and thirst for His righteousness. The pure will see God and experience intimate fellowship with Him.

Peacemakers are addressed in Jesus' seventh Beatitude. Peace describes a state of wholeness and completeness in all areas of life, including our relationships with God and others. Those who strive to make peace do the work of God and will be called children of God.

In the final beatitude Jesus dealt with an inevitable fact of life for true followers of Christ: they'll be persecuted. Those who are persecuted because they serve Christ can rejoice because their reward in heaven will be great.

Review the eight characteristics in the Beatitudes. Which one do you believe to be most needed in our world today?

Which one is most needed in your community?



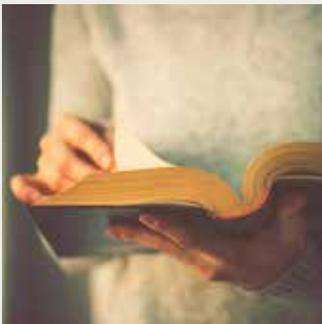
➤ OBEY THE TEXT

Blessings in the kingdom of heaven are reflected in radically countercultural lives today. God's gift of kingdom life is the only genuine satisfaction of those yearning for righteousness.

Reflect on the eight characteristics identified by Jesus in the Beatitudes. In which of these areas are you most openly demonstrating Christ's character?

What actions do you need to take to more faithfully live according to His standards?

As a group, evaluate on a scale of 1 to 5 how well your group demonstrates each of the eight characteristics. Identify the one needing the most attention in your group and develop a plan for improving the demonstration of that characteristic within the group.



MEMORIZE

“Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed, for they will be filled.” Matthew 5:6

USE THE SPACE PROVIDED TO MAKE OBSERVATIONS AND RECORD PRAYER REQUESTS DURING THE GROUP EXPERIENCE FOR THIS SESSION.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you'll put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.



▶ GETTING STARTED

OPENING OPTIONS: Choose one of the following to open the group discussion.

WEEKLY QUOTATION DISCUSSION STARTER: “Happiness is not a goal; it is a by-product.”
—Eleanor Roosevelt

- › What’s your initial response to this week’s quotation?
- › What’s your happiest memory?
- › When have been disappointed to discover that something didn’t make you as happy as you had expected?
- › Today we’ll see that Jesus spoke of happiness in a surprising way.

CREATIVE ACTIVITY: To prepare, identify your happiest memory. Secure a photo or another object that reminds you of that memory. When everyone has arrived, open your time together by briefly sharing your happiest memory, showing any object that may help tell your story. Then use the following to open your discussion.

- › Everyone wants to be happy. What’s your happiest memory?
- › What currently makes you happy?
- › What do you currently look forward to?
- › Some people have a tendency to think happiness is nonspiritual or a less spiritual emotion. Jesus, however opened the Sermon on the Mount with an appeal to our natural desire for true happiness, both now and in the future.

▶ UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVIDE BACKGROUND: Briefly introduce members to Matthew 5–7 by pointing out the major themes and any information or ideas that will help them understand Matthew 5:1-12 (see pp. 7 and 9). Then, to help people personally connect today’s context with the original context, use the following questions and statements.

- › Why was it important for the original audience of Matthew’s Gospel to see Jesus in light of the Old Testament? Why is it still important for readers today?
- › As we begin our study of Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount, pay attention to ways Jesus reshaped people’s understanding of life in relationship with God.

➤ EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ THE BIBLE: Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 5:1-12.

DISCUSS: Use the following questions to discuss group members' initial reactions to the text.

- In verse 1 why is it significant that the statement “He went up the mountain” had been used only in the Old Testament when God gave Moses the law for His people? In what ways was Jesus greater than Moses?
- In verses 3 and 10 the Beatitudes begin and end with “for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.” What does this statement reveal about the kingdom?
- As you look at each Beatitude, identify ways Jesus' descriptions of kingdom people stand in stark contrast with earthly cultures. What description is most surprising?
- What key word appears in each characteristic of kingdom people? What does this repetition reveal about Jesus' main point?
- The word *blessed* can also be translated *happy*. In verses 4-9 why is it significant that Jesus described the reason for happiness as being rooted in the future? How does each future hope relate to present realities? In verse 12 how did Jesus point to the past for encouragement?
- What does this Scripture passage reveal about God's character? About natural human tendencies? About life in the kingdom?

NOTE: Provide ample time for group members to share responses and questions about the text. Don't feel pressured to prioritize the printed agenda over group members' personal experiences. If time allows, discuss responses to the questions in the personal reading.

➤ OBEY THE TEXT

RESPOND: Foster an environment of openness and action. Help individuals apply biblical truth to specific areas of personal thought, attitude, and/or behavior.

- Notice the way Matthew 5 begins. How are you putting yourself in a teachable posture to listen to Jesus? Are you His disciple?
- Notice that the second half of each Beatitude begins with the word *for*. Which description is most encouraging to you personally? Why?
- Which of the Beatitudes is most convicting? How can you begin valuing what Jesus described in that particular Beatitude?

PRAY: Close by asking for humble, teachable hearts. Thank God for new life through faith in Jesus. Pray that each person will reflect the character of a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.