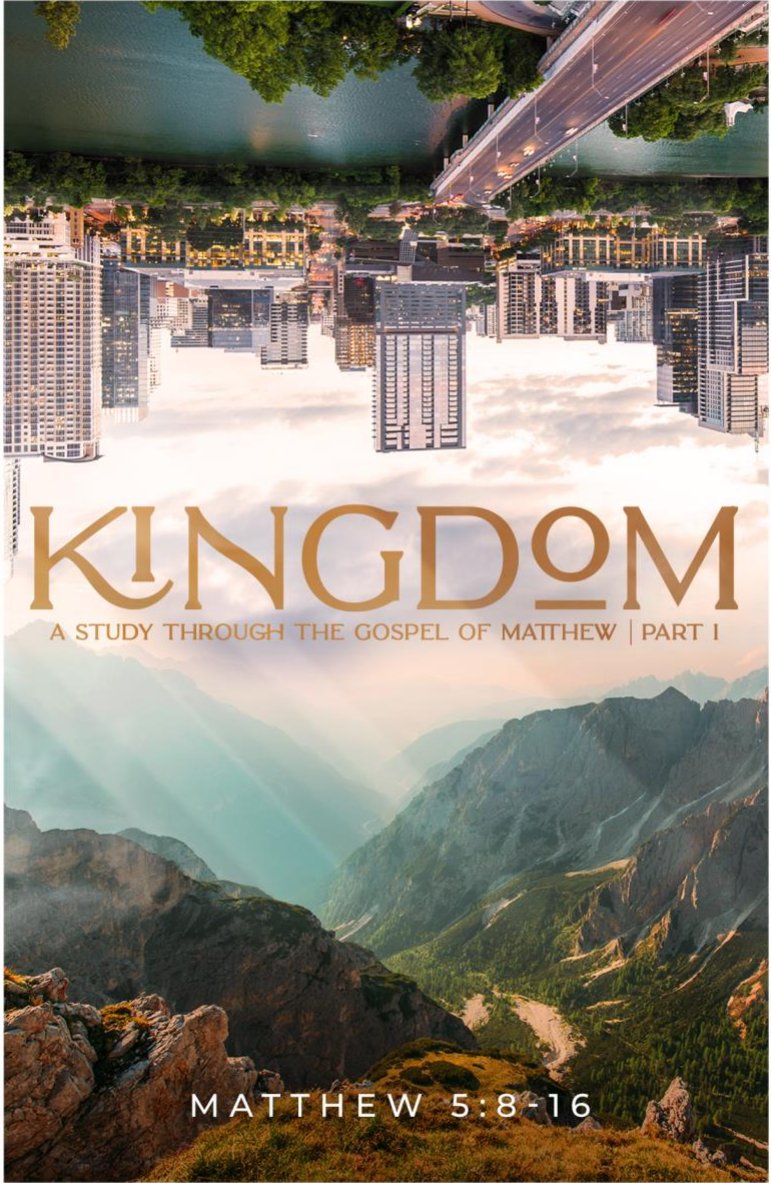




WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 16-20

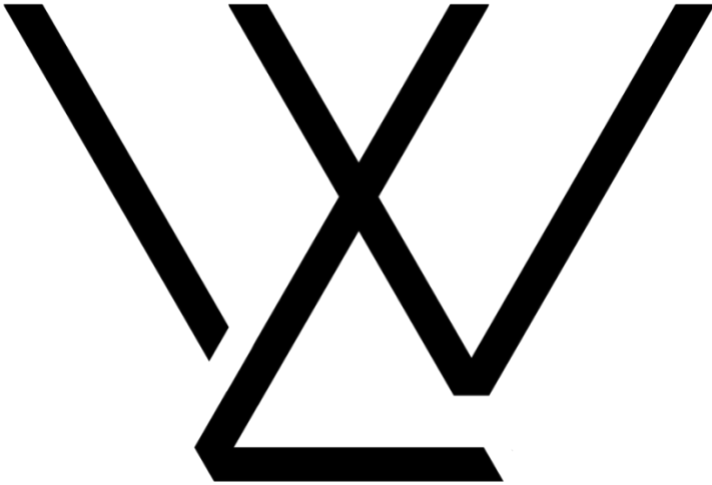


KINGDOM

A STUDY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW | PART I

MATTHEW 5:8-16





Word to Life's are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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Week 16: Matthew 5:8

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 5:1-10

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Question:** How would you define what it means to have purity of heart?

- **Question:** How is purity of heart related to the other beatitudes in vv. 1-10?

- **Question:** If purity of heart leads us to see God, does it logically follow that impurity of heart disables our ability to see God?

- **Question:** Read Philippians 4:8-9. What other things are connected to purity in Paul's writing to the church?

- **Question:** Would you describe your life and faith as pure? Why or why not?

Activity: Read, pray, and memorize 1 John 3:1-3 this week.

¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Week 16: Matthew 5:8

Day 2: What Does it Mean to Have a Pure Heart?

READ: Matthew 5:8 and Jeremiah 32:39

EXPLORE:

The Greek word used here for “pure” is *katharos*, and it has two basic meanings: “clean” and “unmixed”; having no double-allegiance. In other words, to be 99.9% pure is not purity at all.

Paul contrasted the believers with the false teachers of his day in 1 Timothy 1:5, *“The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”* To be pure in heart means that you are sincere, without hypocrisy. Blessed is the man whose motives are always entirely unadulterated, for that man shall see God. One who is pure in heart is not a person who never sins but is a person who wills not to sin. And when he does sin, he is sincerely repentant. When he prays, he is honest in his self-evaluation, *“Father, forgive me for I have sinned.”* His religion is not a performance that looks good on the outside; but with all his heart, he has no wish to displease or dishonor the One he loves.

Under the new covenant, when God makes a sinner clean, He does it by giving them a new heart that wholly wants to worship Him in spirit and in truth. His devotion is without pretense. Ezekiel 36:26 reads, *“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”* Jeremiah 32:39 reiterates, *“I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear Me for their own good and the good of their children after them.”*

We cannot fool God for He does not look merely at the outward appearance, but at the heart.¹

David was a man whose heart was attuned to God's own heart. He desired to do God's will. Though not sinless, David was a repentant man who was single-minded in devotion and integrity. The Scriptures are clear about how this single-minded fidelity connects us with God. 2 Chronicles 16:9 reads, *"The eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His."* This beatitude is not preaching sinless perfection in the flesh, but one who grieves over their imperfections, longing to be holy even as He is holy.

A person's reputation is what others think about them. A person's character is what God truly and deeply knows about them. Both reputation and character matter, but this passage encourages us with the reality that the pure in heart will truly and wondrously see God!

BIG IDEA: The pure in heart shall see God as He faithfully reveals Himself to them.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Does your character of heart agree with the reputation you hold?

- **Activity:** If you need to confess or sincerely repent, take time with God to do this with all your heart.

¹ See I Samuel 16:7 for reference.

Week 16: Matthew 5:8

Day 3: The Pursuit of Purity

READ: Matthew 5:8

EXPLORE:

The Scriptures are not unclear. God cares about purity. Words like modesty, fidelity, chastity, and self-control may appear discarded in culture today, but you will find commands toward purity throughout the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures alike.

David writes in Psalm 51:10-12, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit.”*

Psalm 51:10-12 is a particularly potent reminder that we, like David, need a cleanness of heart to be not only created within us, but also renewed in us. Moreover, this purity in heart corresponds closely with a restored joy of salvation as we are upheld by God.

In James 4:7-10 we read, *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”*

James 4:7-10 is a powerful reminder that although we need God to create a clean heart within us, we are active, cooperating participants in this pursuit of purity. We are commanded to submit, resist, draw near, cleanse our hands, purify our hearts, mourn, weep, and humble ourselves. This list of commands does not leave us with a vague or nebulous picture of what it means to be pure in heart. It spells it out in succinct and purposeful detail.

In Matthew 5:8, Jesus is speaking about a pervasive purity in one's heart that enables them to see God. The life of the Christian is meant to be marked by purity. The result of that purity is an ability to clearly see God. Despite these profound and joyous truths, there is far too often a compromising embrace of impurity and a resulting spiritual blindness.

It is safe to assume that when we study this biblical text alongside others we often tend to overcomplicate and simultaneously underapply the difficult but necessary scriptural truths. This grieves the heart of God when we claim to have studied Scriptures without soberly considering how they ought to be manifested in our lives. So, let us consider straightforward questions which flow directly from the biblical text we have been studying this week.

Where in your life do you sense an impurity of heart? When did you last grieve over your own lack of purity? How often have you been grieved by your own sin? In what ways is your lack of purity keeping you from simply and powerfully seeing God? Do you recognize the remarkable damage that impurity does to your life and faith? Do you know that God desires to create and restore within you a clean heart which enables you to see Him clearly?

BIG IDEA: Being pure in heart enables us to see God clearly.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Spend time soberly considering the questions above.

Week 16: Matthew 5:8

Day 4: They Shall See God

READ: 1 Corinthians 13:12 and John 1:18

EXPLORE:

“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” Let’s stop to consider, *“What does it mean to see God?”*

We are taught that nobody can see God and live.² We know that God is spirit.³ Often when we think of ‘spirit’, we imagine an ethereal vapor of sorts—something less tangible than our material world—and this is true in a way. There is a material and immaterial component to reality; and a ‘spirit’ does not contain physicality, meaning we cannot access it with our five senses. However, when Jesus said, “God is Spirit,” He did not just mean something hidden and abstract. He meant that GOD IS the very source of all reality. Everything physical and material that we think of as primary was created from and is sustained by His mighty Spirit. The immaterial is just as real as the material.

So, what does Jesus mean when He says in Matthew 5:8, *“they shall see God?”* Since God is immaterial and we cannot observe immaterial objects with our senses, we need to keep in mind the difference between direct and indirect observation. Mankind cannot see God how He really is—in the fullness of His glory.⁴ This is not because God does not permit it, but because it is more than mortal men can tolerate.⁵ God in His fullness cannot be seen. He is omnipresent (everywhere all at once) and infinite (not confined to a location). Our physicality restricts us. Nobody can ‘see’ or comprehend an infinite presence. It is beyond our human capabilities.

However, God has manifested Himself in knowable ways for our benefit. God can be seen (indirectly observed) in different ways. First, through people, He is the sustaining force in the lives of unbelievers and

² See Exodus 33:20 for reference.

³ See John 4:24 for reference.

⁴ See I Timothy 6:15-16 for reference.

⁵ See Isaiah 6:5 for reference.

believers and made all people in His image.⁶ In addition, there is the moral law of God written on the hearts of all men.⁷ For believers, He not only sustains our bodies but also our soul. We have been given the Holy Spirit—the very presence of God Himself—for wisdom, power, comfort, and access to the Almighty. Second, through creation: Paul writes in Romans 1:20 that God’s invisible qualities can be clearly seen and understood from what has been made. Third, through Jesus Christ: historical documents tell us about the life and person of Jesus. Hebrews 1:3 says that “Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being.” It is because Jesus (the second person of the godhead) put on a physical nature that humanity was able to ‘see’ what God was like—His heart and desires.

We see God’s desire to make Himself known to mankind all throughout Scripture. Isaiah saw God’s throne⁸, Old Testament characters encountered the Spirit of the Lord (often called a theophany or Christophany—the appearance of the pre-incarnate Son), and Moses was said to have talked to God ‘face to face’—an anthropomorphic idiom meaning intimately.⁹ One day, each one of us will remove this earthly tent we call a body and will be in the presence of the Almighty God without restriction.¹⁰ Until then, those who have eyes to see, will see the glory of God all around.

BIG IDEA: Design, beauty, creation, moral law, history, and the indwelling Holy Spirit allow us to ‘see’ God.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you have to see something with your eyes to believe it? What does Jesus say about that?
Hint: John 20:29

- **Question:** What are some things you know to be true that you cannot directly observe? Are they less real?

⁶ See Colossians 1:17 and Genesis 1:27 for references.

⁷ See Romans 2:14-15 for reference.

⁸ See Isaiah 6 for reference.

⁹ See Exodus 33:11,23 for reference.

¹⁰ See Revelation 22 for reference.

Week 16: Matthew 5:8

Day 5: A Day to Share | The Pure in Heart

READ TOGETHER: 1 John 3:2-3, James 1:26-27, Psalm 24:3-5

***Instructions:** We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

The most holy people on earth are the happiest people on earth. Holiness is not a stodgy, stuffy, or stuck-up state of being. Holiness is delightful. God, who is the Holy One, is perfectly happy. God could not be any more joyful than He is presently. He is perfectly holy and perfectly happy; and as we reflect His holiness, we also reflect His happiness.

If we want to grow in happiness, then we must grow in purity of heart. Christianity is an internal work before it becomes an outward working. Our hearts must be clean. This means that our hearts need to be washed by Almighty God from all impurities and defilements. Think of King David asking God to wash him white as snow. We are sinners and our hearts are often impure. The true Christian asks God to purify his/her heart. This gets down to the level of thoughts, desires, affections, and will. The pure in heart do not allow their emotions to run wild nor do they justify ungodly emotions like lust and anger.

The pure in heart also pursue what is true, good, and beautiful. Their desires are aimed in the right direction. The pure in heart visit widows and orphans in their affliction. This means that the pure in heart aim at helping those who have little to nothing that

they can offer in return. The pure in heart do not do good deeds to receive something back, but simply for the goodness of the deed. This reminds us of our Lord's earthly ministry of teaching and healing.

The reward for the pure in heart is that they will see God. In this life we see Christ through the eyes of faith. In the life to come we will see Christ face to face. There is no higher honor or glory for the Christian than to see God. We are relational creatures. This is how God has made us. We delight to see those whom we love. We love God because He first loved us. When we see Him, we shall be like Him—holy and happy.

BIG IDEA: The pure in heart are internally pure and rejoice in seeing God.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Why do you think holiness often sounds negative to people?

- **Question:** What are some things you delight to see? You will notice that what you love is what you delight to see. What does this teach you about faith in God?

Week 17: Matthew 5:9

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 5:1-10 (Focusing on v. 9)

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity**: While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question**: Do you think there is a difference between being peaceful and being a peacemaker? If so, how would you describe the difference?

- **Question**: What are some contemporary examples of peacemaking that come to mind for you?

- **Question**: Why do you think the promise associated with this specific blessing for the “*peacemakers*” is being *called sons of God*?

- **Question:** Do you think it is possible to be a peacemaker and still be perceived as a conflict-maker? Why or why not?

- **Activity:** Using an online or physical concordance, look up how many times in the Old Testament and the New Testament we read the term “peace.”

- **Question:** I Timothy 3:1-7 provides a list of qualifications for serving as an elder in the church. How many of the qualifications listed incorporate peacemaking?

Activity: Read, meditate, and pray through John 16:32-33

³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.

³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Week 17: Matthew 5:9

Day 2: Peacemaker

READ: Matthew 5:9

EXPLORE:

Today we will focus on Matthew 5:9, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”* What does it mean to be a peacemaker? There are several places in the Bible where the idea of proactively seeking peace is discussed.

James 3:16-18 states, *“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”* James sheds some light on what it means to be a peacemaker, and how a peacemaker will go about the active pursuit of peace. Righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Righteousness is the quality of being morally right or justifiable. Romans 3:10-11 tells us, *“There is none righteous, no not one; There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.”* The idea of peace or *shalom* in the bible is about wholeness or completeness, especially with God. So how can we sow this righteousness when we are separated from God due to sin, and what does it mean to spread the idea of wholeness or completeness?

Colossians 1:19-22 provides a good answer to this question. *“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds, he has*

now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”

Because Jesus proactively sought the reconciliation of God and humanity through His death on the cross, we are able to be presented as righteous. Because we owe our righteousness to Jesus, who gives us peace through reconciliation with God, we proactively seek peace by spreading the gospel which is the good news that while we were sinners and far from God, Jesus dies to reconcile us with God. The state of peace or Shalom is accomplished for all those that choose to believe. Jesus' example is that of the ultimate peacemaker, who reconciled us with God, and should be our example of how to proactively seek peace.

BIG IDEA: Proactively seek peace through sharing the gospel.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Think of the person who shared the gospel message with you. What can you learn from that experience to help you spread peace?

- **Questions:** What are some steps you can take to proactively seek peace? What are some examples from your life where you were a peacemaker that you can build upon?

Week 17: Matthew 5:9

Day 3: False Peace and the Real Thing

READ: Matthew 5:9 and John 14:15-31

EXPLORE:

Some counterfeits are easy to spot. Others are not quite as simple. There are fake foods, fake jewelry, and fake photos. There are counterfeits not only of physical things, but of spiritual realities. Our world is filled to the brim with cheap and falsified imitations of love, honor, freedom, and discovery. Moreover, as we will observe in our world and in the Scriptures, there is a very real and present counterfeit of true biblical peace.

When Jesus was talking with His disciples about the beautiful gift of the Holy Spirit which would be given, He said this, *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”*¹¹

In the time that Jesus walked the earth, there was a well-known term *“Pax Romana.”* It generally refers to a two-century time period in which the *Pax Romana* or militaristically enforced peace brought a general sense of stability and relative forms of prosperity. Rome’s peace was established on military engagement, domination, coercion, and force. Christ came to secure and to give a very different type of peace for those who would believe. Jesus’ words in John 14 clearly contrasted this counterfeit. God’s gift of peace through the Holy Spirit’s presence contrasts the world’s counterfeit peace not only in terms of *what* is given, but in relationship to *how* it is given. Think about the painfully brief understanding of Pax Romana that we explored

¹¹ See John 14:26-27 for reference.

above. First-century Rome claimed to provide peace through stability and control, but did they really?

First and foremost, biblical peace is a peace from God and with God. Certainly, we all know that there is a world of difference between being surrounded by stability and truly being biblically peaceful. For those who are in Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, it is possible to experience peace in times of external stability and instability alike. For those who are in Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, it is possible to experience peace in times of economic prosperity and even in deprivation. Jesus' peace was and still is drastically different from the counterfeit versions of peace we experience.

The eventual demise of *Pax Romana* was far from the last time that a counterfeit juxtaposed a gospel-saturated, Holy Spirit empowered peace.

I (Stephen) have wondered, "Could it be possible that we claim to have a peace which is anchored in God, when, in contrast, we are just content with the comfort and ease that so often accompanies economic prosperity?" Could it be possible that we claim to have a peace which comes from God, when, in fact, we are simply embracing a worldly counterfeit which is quite different from the real thing?

BIG IDEA: Not everything that is called peace or peaceful in our world today is the real thing.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Pray that God would expose areas in which you have embraced counterfeits and empower you to live in light of the peace which He secured for those who believe.

Week 17: Matthew 5:9

Day 4: Just Like Your Dad!

READ: Matthew 5:9

EXPLORE:

“She has your eyes!” “He has your nose!” “I can see the family resemblance.” These observations are often made about children as they grow and are compared to their parents. How many couples have looked upon their newborn and debated over which features belong to which parent?

The Bible tells us that man was created in God’s image. In a manner that might be hard for us to grasp, when God made Adam and Eve, an outside observer might have looked at God’s image bearers and exclaimed, “I see the family resemblance!” That state didn’t last long. When the first humans disobeyed God, it brought separation, brokenness, and distortion of our image-bearing capability.

In the wake of the first sin and its consequences, God promised to send His Son, who would bear His image perfectly. People would be able to look at the way Jesus lived and say, “He’s just like His Dad!” In fact, in John 14:9, Jesus told His followers that if they had seen Him (Jesus), they had seen the Father (God). Jesus is God the Son who perfectly represents God the Father.

Jesus lived a perfect life and gave it as payment for the lives that you and I have destroyed by sin, the lives that were supposed to represent God. Those who accept the gift of forgiveness that Jesus offers become members of God’s family. In John 3:3, Jesus uses the imagery of birth to help us understand this concept. Developing this imagery, 1 John 3:1 (among many other passages)

calls those who have put their trust in Jesus “children of God.” When sin entered God’s creation, mankind’s image-bearing capability was severely distorted. Being born into God’s family allows us to step into the image-bearing design God created us for.

Jesus says that when we make peace, we are acting just like our Father. He made ultimate peace for us through His Son. Now, we get to be ambassadors of that peace to others.

BIG IDEA: As His sons and daughters, our lives should possess the family traits of God.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Being sons and daughters of God secures our position in His family in a beautiful and unimaginable way. It also gives us the responsibility to represent Him well. There is a family name to live up to! We cannot do it on our own strength. Galatians 5:22 talks about how the Christian life should produce fruit of the Spirit, among which is peace.

- **Activity:** Read Galatians 5:16-26. What must we do to see the fruit of the Spirit produced in our lives?

Week 17: Matthew 5:9

Day 5: A Day to Share | Peacemakers

READ TOGETHER: Philippians 4:2-3, 1 Corinthians 1:10-11, Colossians 1:19-20

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Imagine there are two women in the church who have a dispute. They aren't talking much to each other, and some people are starting to take sides with one or the other. This is what happened in the church of Philippi between Euodia and Syntyche. The apostle Paul encouraged them to agree in the Lord and he even called on one of the leaders in the church to help them and be a peacemaker. God so highly values peace within His church that these two women serve as an example to the church for all time.

Peacemakers are pure towards God and peaceable towards men. Christ first reconciles relationships between God and man and then amongst humanity. A peacemaker first has a peaceable disposition. They are looking for peace. When peace is slipping away, they immediately try and recover it. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.¹² A peacemaker is humble and not easily angered. They do not believe that they will be heard for their many words. A peacemaker not only seeks to make peace for himself but also for any other warring factions.

¹² See Proverbs 15:1 for reference.

One could say that the first letter to the Corinthians is a peacemaking effort. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth because he had heard that there were divisions among them. 1 Corinthians is a letter of reconciliation. The church today is just as much in need of this Beatitude as the early church. May God grant us wisdom in peacemaking.

The reward of a peacemaker is that they shall be called sons of God. God will own them, and they will resemble Him. God births peacemakers and they share the likeness of their Father in heaven. Christ is the ultimate peacemaker. He makes peace with us through the blood of His cross. If we have peace with God then we will also make peace with each other.

BIG IDEA: We are peacemakers because Christ has made peace with us.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Activity:** Share an example of when someone you know was a peacemaker.

- **Question:** Why are peacemakers happy?

Week 18: Matthew 5:10

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 5:1-10

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question:** What do you think it means to be persecuted for righteousness' sake?

- **Question:** Do you think it is possible for someone to believe they are experiencing persecution, but it's not actually "for righteousness' sake?" Explain your answer below.

- **Question:** Why do you think vv. 3 and 10 are both in the present tense while vv. 4-9 are oriented toward the future?

- **Question:** Do you typically think of those who are persecuted as “blessed?” Why or why not?

- **Question:** Why do you think it is significant that persecution is associated with being given the kingdom of heaven?

- **Question:** Can you think of any other examples in Scripture where persecution was closely linked to blessing?

- **Question:** If persecution leads to the development of character and resolve, should we then want to be persecuted?

Week 18: Matthew 5:10

Day 2: “For the Sake of Righteousness”

READ: Matthew 5:10

EXPLORE:

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, recorded for us in Matthew 5-7, is a teaching that stood out to the audience to whom it was given, and it demonstrated Jesus’ superiority over other teachers. Jesus spoke with authority, exposed the limitations of the law, and revealed how deep sin lies in the heart. The beatitudes, in particular, are hard to swallow given that they challenge our ideas of someone who is “blessed”. The depravity of the human race is exposed and our profound need for a savior is highlighted.

Matthew 5:10 reads, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”*

When we look at this blessing associated with persecution for righteousness’ sake, we should first look back at v. 6, which is a blessing associated with the *hunger and thirst for righteousness*. This verse precedes v. 10 to show us the heart posture we must have towards righteousness in order to willingly be persecuted for its sake. So, what is righteousness, and why does being persecuted for its sake lead us to inherit the kingdom of God? 2 Corinthians 5:21 reads, *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

When we are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, we carry around in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that His life can be reflected through us to reach those who do not believe.¹³ We are to remember His sacrifice. Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, made to be sin when He knew no sin, so that we could be restored to right relationship with the Father and become His righteousness. This is the work of our justification leading to sanctification, where the people of God are set apart to draw nearer to Him and surrender to the daily purification of our hearts. This righteousness is something we should hunger and thirst for, knowing

¹³ See II Corinthians 4:9-11 for reference.

that as we are being alienated from the world, we are approaching the kingdom of heaven. If we truly love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we should know that when our foundation is in Christ, these parts of us cannot be shaken. We are called to daily surrender to the will of God so that He can bring us into His righteousness. Jesus' love was wholly perfect and selfless; it is sobering to think of the times that we give up on other people who hurt us, when our Savior bore so much for us whose every wrong was first against Him.

Throughout history, God has always kept His promises. We see it in his covenants with Abraham and Moses, through the prophets, and in the person and work of Jesus. To the poor in spirit, and to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, the kingdom of heaven is promised. In Matthew 20, a rich young man came to Jesus, and asked what he must do to receive eternal life. Jesus' simple response is that the young man should sell his possessions and follow Him. The young man, instead, chose his earthly inheritance over all that he could have gained through a relationship with the Son of God. Jesus desires our hearts, and He gives us the ability to follow him. Choosing to follow Jesus along the narrow path comes at a great cost. For some, it will cost their lives. One day, however, we will be raised in glory with Him, where he sits at the right hand of God. As we walk this earth, we can be encouraged when we remember that there was One who walked before us who experienced the fullness of pain and suffering but bore it all sinlessly, in obedience to God the Father.

BIG IDEA: In persecution for righteousness' sake, we recall Jesus' sacrifice, and anticipate our future glory alongside Him.

APPLY:

- **Question:** As you walk with Christ, do you feel that you are truly hungry and thirsty for righteousness? What would that look like?
- **Question:** The kingdom of heaven is the blessing associated both with being poor in spirit and with being persecuted for righteousness' sake. What do you think is the significance of this?

Week 18: Matthew 5:10

Day 3: Preparing Our Hearts for Persecution

READ: Matthew 5:10; Matthew 26:41; 1 Peter 5:6-11

EXPLORE:

Andrew Brunson was a missionary in Turkey. He thought he could handle persecution. Instead, when he was imprisoned in solitary confinement, facing three life sentences, he felt isolated, afraid, angry, doubtful, and suicidal. When he was allowed to receive a visit from his mother, she told him, “There is a long line of people who have gone before you [in suffering for Christ]. Now it’s your turn.”

After two years, Brunson was released from prison. He made a video series, “Prepare to Stand,” in which he warns that our relative freedom from persecution is the exception – that Christians will increasingly be marked for persecution because we profess biblical truth about righteousness and sin. His videos can help strengthen our own hearts for persecution.

Persecution is different from other trials we face because we can avoid it just by compromising. We need to pray now that we will have the faith to stand. In predicting that persecution will be more difficult than we expect, Brunson’s goal is not to inspire fear, but to change our mindset and strengthen our hearts to remain faithful.

Brunson discovered that persecution was a test. Part of the test was that he felt completely abandoned by God. Although he didn’t experience God’s presence during this time, the final outcome was a newfound intimacy with Christ. At his lowest point, Brunson began to declare repeatedly, “Jesus is my reward.” He repeatedly chose to turn toward God, rather than away. He resolved to worship the Lord for thirty minutes every day, even

though he didn't feel like it. He sang and danced daily before the Lord as a matter of obedience.

Prior to his imprisonment, Brunson had been like the Hare in Aesop's fable, sprinting towards God for a season and then getting sidetracked. Persecution produced in him the slow, steady, disciplined endurance of a Tortoise. We likewise must build perseverance now through small daily steps of obedience, even when we don't feel like it.

Jesus has many admirers but few lovers. Admirers give up when it gets tough, but lovers continue to follow Jesus at great risk to themselves. We need to be sober-minded as we prepare for the testing of our faith, resolving to remain faithful to the end.

BIG IDEA: We do not need to be afraid of persecution, but we do need to prepare our hearts for it.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Should followers of Jesus expect persecution? Why or why not?
- **Question:** How can you start now to prepare your heart for persecution?
- **Activity:** Contrast the tortoise and the hare in Aesop's fable. In your Christian walk, are you a tortoise or a hare?
- **Optional:** Watch "Prepare to Stand."¹⁴

¹⁴ Brunson, Andrew. "Prepare to Stand" www.frc.org/preparetostand

Week 18: Matthew 5:10

Day 4: Praying for the Persecuted

READ: Matthew 5:10; Isaiah 41:10

EXPLORE:

There are over 3 billion people in the world who do not have access to the Gospel of Jesus. In addition, each year over 200 million believers are persecuted for their faith. You can be persecuted by the tongue or by the hand, and certainly here in the USA, Christians are persecuted by the tongue more and more. In many countries with oppressive governments, Christianity is illegal, and churches are bombed and defaced and followers of Jesus face prison, torture, and even death. This is persecution by the hand.

If you follow Jesus you will be ill-treated. You will experience opposition. You should expect it. Peter tells us that we shouldn't be surprised when we suffer.¹⁵ All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.¹⁶ The world will not thank you for being a Christian. It does not want to hear about moral rights and wrongs. It does not want to hear about the sinfulness of mankind. It does not want to hear about the need for a savior. Yet, we are called to stand strong and continue to speak truth in love because He is worth it! St. Augustine said, "The cause, not the suffering, makes a genuine martyr."

It is important that as a united body of Christ we pray for the persecuted church in our nation and the world. Jesus said we can ask anything in His name and He will do it.¹⁷ Let's pray for our brothers and sisters here and around the world to have wisdom and endurance. Let's pray that God will allow them to gather. Let's pray for their protection and that they will not live in fear but with power, love, and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).¹⁸ Pray God will strengthen their faith, strengthen their courage, and strengthen their numbers. Pray that God will give them opportunity to meet and share the gospel of grace with others.

¹⁵ See I Peter 4:12 for reference.

¹⁶ See I Timothy 3:12 for reference.

¹⁷ See John 14:14 for reference.

¹⁸ See II Timothy 1:7 for reference.

Pray they have a bold disposition in the face of the unknown and a powerful testimony that would captivate many. Pray that the peace and comfort of God would overtake them in their turmoil. Pray for the organizations working to support these Christians; may they have all they need to continue to bring light into the darkness. We also want to pray for those who are persecuting others.¹⁹ Pray that the country's leaders change their oppressive policies, laws, and beliefs. Ask the Lord to change their hearts and help His people live in freedom. Pray the Spirit of God would overtake the hearts and minds of the oppressors and they, like the apostle Paul, would repent and be a mighty force for the expansion of Christ's Kingdom.

Do you have a heart for the persecuted church? Here are some organizations worth looking into. The Voice of the Martyrs is a non-profit, inter-denominational Christian ministry dedicated to assisting the persecuted church worldwide. The Joshua Project is a research initiative that aims to highlight the world's ethnic groups with the fewest followers of Christ, and the Stratus Index synthesizes reliable data from different sources to clearly display the world's most urgent spiritual and physical needs. We are one body and are called to pray for one another (James 5:16).

BIG IDEA: Pray for those who choose death over denial and faith over fear.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What are some tangible ways you can support your brethren across the world?

- **Challenge:** Pray every day for your persecuted brothers and sisters.

¹⁹ See Matthew 5:44 for reference.

Week 18: Matthew 5:10

Day 5: A Day to Share | Blessed are the Persecuted

READ TOGETHER: Acts 16:19-25, 1 John 3:13-15, and Isaiah 5:20

***Instructions:** We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. One of the great examples of this happiness is found in Acts 16. Paul and Silas were preaching the gospel in Philippi and they were accused of disturbing the city. The magistrates had them severely beaten with rods, then thrown into an inner prison with their feet clamped in stocks. Surprisingly, the following verse says that at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Paul and Silas were joyful. How could this be so?

Paul and Silas took the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 to heart. They understood that this persecution gave them evidence that they had a true stake in the kingdom of heaven. Those who excel in virtue will receive the most hardships. This can be seen in the example of our Lord, who was perfect in virtue, and he received the most antagonism from lawless men. John the Baptist was a virtuous man, the greatest born among women, and he was beheaded. The church has been a persecuted group ever since righteous Abel's blood was poured out by the hand of Cain.

The church is persecuted for righteousness' sake because the world loves the darkness rather than the light. The world hates to

have their deeds exposed and wonders why the church does not want to participate in their wickedness. We are now living in a time where, oddly enough, the world criticizes the church for not being moral enough. But this should not surprise us – the world has been calling evil good and good evil for a very long time.

The reward for those who suffer for doing good is the kingdom of heaven. The persecuted receive a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven now, and in the future they will receive the kingdom fully and forever. There is a special legacy attached to the persecuted church and their eternal reward cannot be diminished.

BIG IDEA: Believing the promises of God makes us joyful when we are persecuted.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What kind of persecution do you see the church in America receiving today?

- **Question:** How can we be happy when we are persecuted for the sake of righteousness?

Week 19: Matthew 5:11-12

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 5:11-12

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Question:** Have you ever experienced a situation like the one described in vv. 11-12 in your life? If so, how did you respond to that situation?

- **Activity:** Summarize vv. 11-12 in your own words as succinctly as possible.

- **Question:** Why do you think it would be helpful to consider the prophet's example when considering persecution and slander?

- **Question:** What is the basis/reason for joy and gladness in v. 12?

- **Activity:** Spend time reading, studying, meditating, and praying through I Peter 4:12-14 today and throughout the week.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

- **Question:** Today marks the completion of our study through the Beatitudes. As you've read and thought through each, which do you find the most challenging personally and why?

Week 19: Matthew 5:11-12

Day 2: Persecution and Slander

READ: Matthew 5:11-12

EXPLORE:

One of my (Michael's) favorite movies is a fantastic thriller in which a fugitive narrowly escapes a likeable lawman time after time in a desperate attempt to clear his name concerning a crime he didn't commit. At the same time, the fugitive is trying to find the real killer. Throughout the story and others like it, we experience an increased passion for the protagonist because of the added dimension of the false nature of the accusations.

In this final beatitude, Jesus blesses those who suffer from insults, gossip and slander and most of all those who experience this on His account. In a break from the established beatitude pattern, Jesus pivots to the imperative tense and gives a command to *"rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."* We are not just blessed to be insulted and slandered in devotion to Jesus but also supposed to delight in it. In the eyes of the world this makes no sense. A worldly ideology and concept of justice instructs us to defend our honor and innocence at all costs, not let our false accusers get the drop on us.

Humor me a bit as I (Michael) revisit the movie plot one more time. Arguably the best line in the movie comes when the fugitive proclaims his innocence to the federal marshal. The relentless hunter's response comes with three perfectly delivered words: "I don't care". The Marshal isn't a judge. He is there to capture and return the fugitive, not determine whether he is guilty or not.

In contrast, God does care about you. It's just that he isn't concerned with our sometimes skewed sense of justice. He wants you to be guilty of sharing the gospel. He doesn't care about you proving your innocence and defending your honor in

the present but instead cares about your eternal acquittal for the sins you have committed. He didn't die on the cross just to prevent you from committing sins; he died so you wouldn't have to spend eternity being punished for all the sins you commit.

When Jesus stood in front of the chief priests, Pilate, and Herod, He didn't defend himself against their slanderous accusations. Ultimately, He was guilty for the reasons they really wanted to kill Him: sharing the good news, undermining their authority and speaking the truth. Besides, His sentence had been determined since the beginning, so why not spend these last precious moments on Earth sharing His message instead of defending it?

In many cases, our only defense against our false accusers is to renege on what we said or compromise the message, so Jesus, in lieu of succumbing to that temptation, instructs us to accept our trials in this world and focus on our eternal rewards.

BIG IDEA: When confronted with persecution and slander as a result of your faith, focus on your defense of the gospel and your eternal rewards rather than defending your own reputation or maintaining your status.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Read 2 Corinthians 12:19-20. Spend some time reflecting on the impact of slander and gossip within the church and your past participation in and/or complicity with it.

Week 19: Matthew 5:11-12

Day 3: Kiss the Wave

READ: Matthew 5:11-12 and Romans 5:1-11

EXPLORE:

Matthew 5:11-12 speaks of the persecution that many believers face and the sufferings that come as a result. Nevertheless, this passage commands those who suffer to rejoice, to be glad amid that suffering! Clearly, the big question is how? How can we have joy when we are under attack and hurting? The simple answer is keeping our perspective on eternity; that our hope is in our eternal reward in heaven and in the glory of God Himself that will come *when* we suffer in faith. But let's unpack that.

Romans 5:1-11 shares with us an amazing picture of what our sufferings produce in and through us when we suffer in faith. Take some time to read the full passage a few times. The first two verses give the "how" to suffer well. They share that those who are justified by faith have the peace of God, no matter the circumstance, because we trust that God's glory will be magnified through our suffering provided that we suffer in dependence upon Him.

Colossians 1:24-25 states, *"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known."* In reading this, we see a hidden glory in our suffering; a beautiful hope and purpose to cling to. When we suffer in faith, trust, and dependence upon Christ, we are filling what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of the Church! This, of course, does not mean that the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is insufficient or lacking redemptive power! Instead, this is saying that what is missing in Christ's suffering is its presentation to those who do not yet know Him. Thus, as believers suffer in faith, they are revealing to the world the riches of God's glory that are so profound that they give hope, peace, and joy amid intense trials! No other religion and no other

god can well up within someone's soul an unbreakable joy in times of grief, loss, sickness, persecution, reviling, or death. Paul chose to suffer for the sake of Christ so that those who saw would come to salvation through Christ's redemptive power.

A quote that means much to me (Courtney) by Spurgeon is, "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages." This quote reveals that suffering has the potential to draw us closer to Christ as we bring Him glory through our joy. In suffering, then, there is a great invitation that is extended to us; to "kiss the wave" as it comes, knowing all the while Who it is taking us to and Who it is drawing others to. This is the very purpose of suffering; that we would draw close to Christ because He, too, is the Suffering Servant.

BIG IDEA: Sufferings provide an opportunity to test the quality of our faith in Christ and our hope in eternity and in the glory of God and to portray the glory of God to the world.

Apply:

- **Question:** What sufferings are you currently facing or experiencing right now that threaten to take away your joy? How can you practically stay Kingdom focused – pure in intention – amidst your suffering?

- **Question:** What does godly joy in your unique sufferings look like in your life? How can you show others that you are trusting that God's glory will be magnified through your sufferings and that you are hoping in an eternity with Christ?

Week 19: Matthew 5:11-12

Day 4: Your Present and Future Reward

READ: Matthew 5:3-12

EXPLORE:

The blessings outlined in Matthew 5:3-10 begin and end with the promised “*kingdom of heaven.*”²⁰ This frames the context of each intervening beatitude. These are kingdom blessings, and the characteristics described are kingdom norms, norms that citizens of God’s kingdom are simultaneously called to and marked by. When we reach verses 11 and 12, however, there is a slight shift in focus. Instead of “*blessed are they*” we read “*blessed are you*”. The persecution introduced in verse 10, which in many ways should be the expected result of living according to each of the beatitudes, is not just an abstract possibility. Rather, it is a very personal reality that Jesus applies directly to His disciples, and also to us today. Facing the prospect that others will “*revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you*” should not leave you hopeless though, because Jesus also gives us a word of hope and encouragement: “*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.*” This is great news, and even greater still, if we take a few moments to dwell on the nature of this reward.

Writing in the fourth century AD, early church father Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 – c. 395) offers the following thoughts in *Homily 8* of his work *On the Beatitudes*:

*What is it that we will obtain? What is the prize? What is the crown? It seems to me that for which we hope is nothing other than the Lord himself. For He himself is the judge of those who contend, and the crown of those who win. He is the one who distributes the inheritance, He himself is the good inheritance. He is the good portion and the giver of the portion, He is the one who makes rich and is himself the riches. He shows you the treasure and is himself your treasure.*²¹

²⁰ See the parallel phrase “*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” in 5:3 and 5:10

²¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On The Beatitudes*, Homily 8

This perspective seems to fit with the broader witness of scripture. The “reward” Jesus speaks of in Matthew 5:12 is akin to the “crown of righteousness” Paul speaks of in 2 Timothy 4:8, which the Lord “will award” to him, and all believers, after they fight the good fight and finish the race.²² Since Jesus himself is our righteousness²³, he is also, in effect, our crown. The Lord’s very presence as our ultimate reward is also consistent with the many Psalms that speak of a longing to dwell with him.²⁴ Moses even emphasizes in Psalm 90 that it’s the satisfaction we find in God’s steadfast love that allows us to “rejoice and be glad all our days” — the same response Jesus calls us to in Matthew 5:12 in light of our promised heavenly reward. Most significantly though, it was the tangible presence of God with us in the garden that we lost at the Fall. And a restoration of that loss, a restoration of that fellowship, is what we’ve needed since.

In this light, Matthew 5:3-12 brings very good news. In our various English translations, most of the beatitudes are framed in the future tense, “they shall” or “they will”, but when speaking of the kingdom in verses 3 and 10, Jesus says “theirs is the kingdom.” Likewise, in verse 12 “your reward is great.” This is a present tense reality. And it’s this present dawning of God’s kingdom, the fact that Jesus is, even now, “God with us”, and the certainty of these kingdom blessings due to Christ’s finished work on the cross, that provide us great hope for our future and great comfort in our present.

BIG IDEA: God himself, and an eternity with him, is our ultimate reward. And even now, we are blessed by the restored relationship we have through Jesus.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Reflecting on Psalm 90, how can finding our ultimate satisfaction and reward in God’s presence with us affect the way we view the trials of our everyday lives?

²² See 2 Timothy 4:6-8 for reference.

²³ See 1 Corinthians 1:30 and 2 Cor. 5:21 for examples of this type of language.

²⁴ See, for example, Psalm 27, Psalm 84, and Psalm 90

Week 19: Matthew 5:11-12

Day 5: A Day to Share | A Great Reward

READ TOGETHER: John 17:14-19, 1 Corinthians 4:11-13, Isaiah 43:2

Instructions: *We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

This beatitude is really a continuation of the previous beatitude. Our Lord thought this teaching of persecution was so important that it needed two beatitudes. We would be wise to pay close attention. Persecution as the final beatitude is fitting in that a godly life results in persecution and persecution unto death brings us to God.

This beatitude teaches us that we will be reviled and falsely accused. The church will be mocked, picked on, bullied by the unbelieving world. We will be made fun of for our Christian beliefs and values. We will be falsely accused of evil deeds. This is because they will not find true accusations of evil deeds against us. Today the world calls us bigoted, misogynistic, homophobic, and many other labels. They curse us in our face and behind our back.

Our Lord tells us in response to rejoice and be glad, for our reward is great in heaven. It is a glory for the church to suffer for the sake of Christ. When pain is inflicted upon us, we must remember these words of reward in heaven. This teaches us that the world is not our home. Promotions may not continue to pile up in this life

but we can be sure that when we are demoted for Christ our reward in heaven is great.

The suffering of the church is not uncommon. The world persecuted the prophets who came before us. The prophets came before us in time in order to give us an example of godly endurance. The grace that sustained the prophets through persecution is the same grace that resides in us. The prophets came before us in excellency. We have not suffered to the point of death like many of them did. Our suffering is partial compared to their suffering. We can praise God for restraining evil in our day.

Heaven is the reward of the persecuted. Treasures in heaven are promised. We cannot lose in this life or the next.

BIG IDEA: The promises of God make us happy in the midst of persecution.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Activity:** Make a list of the prophets who were persecuted and how they were persecuted.

- **Question:** What does the world say today to revile and persecute the church?

Week 20: Matthew 5:13-16

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 5:1-16

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

- **Question:** Three images seem to be utilized in vv. 13-16. Salt, Light, and a City on a Hill. What do you think is meant by these metaphors?

- **Question:** What do you think is the point of v. 13 in your own words?

- **Question:** What do you think is the point of vv. 14-16 in your own words?

- **Question:** According to v. 16 what is the result of our good deeds being seen by others?

- **Question:** In a number of different ways, Jesus seems to indicate the inappropriateness of a light which is hidden. How might His words be challenging to you in your faith today?

- **Question:** Based on what you know about both salt and light, what do you think Jesus was communicating in the usage of those two images?

Activity: Read, meditate, and pray through Matthew 5:14-16.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Week 20: Matthew 5:13-16

Day 2: Salt and Light

READ: Matthew 5:13-16

EXPLORE:

The Beatitudes primarily described the character/expectations of His disciples. Now Jesus moves on to describe how His followers should impact the world around us using two metaphors: salt and light. Today we will discover Jesus' purpose of this imagery for the crowd on the hillside and how it applies to our lives today.

In ancient times, salt had great value. Many Romans received salt along with their wages. Salt was also used to preserve meats, which was a staple for a household. Lastly and most obvious, salt was used for flavor. Likewise, light was used and produced differently. Lamps were the common source of light for households, or they were carried outside to see at night. There was no electricity and there were no dimmer switches. Predominantly oil lamps were used to illuminate their surroundings.

So how does this relate to us today? What did Jesus mean when He said to *"be the salt of the earth"* and to *"be the light of the world?"* These commands are distinct, but both must be applied to the way we live our Christian life.

Like salt, Christians are valuable, called to be preservatives, and add great flavor to the world. Simply put, Christians should be a blessing wherever they are. In a slowly rotting world, we should share the gospel as we desire that no person perish. If we refuse to be salt and not share the good news with those spoiling around us, we are *"no longer good for anything."* We must also be full of flavor, a delight for all to be around. When you interact with others, they should not leave with a bad taste in their mouth. In keeping with the metaphor, we should be gentle and kind instead of using aggression and shame to share Jesus with others. Be persistent, speak the truth of Christ at all times, but make sure what you say and how you say it is God-honoring and tasteful.

Lastly, *“let your light shine before others.”* Just as it is possible to have too much salt on a dish, there is a manner in which we ought not shine. Shining *before* others is different from shining a blinding light directly into someone's eyes. This would be understandably upsetting. Let your light shine in all you do, how you walk, talk, work, and run your household. Others may want to be a dimmer switch. They adjust the light for others' preferences or circumstances. This is why Jesus said, *“Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket.”* Let your light be a comfort, let it be consistent, and let it be obvious. It is not a light for your own glory, but for God's glory alone.

If you are in Christ, you already are salt and you are already light. The question remains, however, *“How will you display these qualities to those you with whom you interact?”* Can others say that it is a blessing that you are a member of this church body? Are you a blessing to your neighborhood, your school, your workplace? How about your household? Pray and consider these things. The lights are going out, and the world is slowly dying. How will you be a glorious light, a flavorful preservative, and where will you start?

Big Idea: We are the salt and light of *all* earth and the image of Christ. We should follow the example Christ modeled for us.

- **Activity:** Think about moments when you have left a bad taste with others you were trying to bless, or those you have blinded rather than simply shown your light to. Meditate and pray that Christ would redeem those moments and grow you as a Christ follower.

Week 20: Matthew 5:13-16

Day 3: Giving Glory to God

READ: Matthew 5:13-16

EXPLORE:

Recently, I (Madeline) was out shopping with a friend, and we were getting some help from an employee at the counter. The older woman working there wasn't particularly the friendliest, but that's okay because this was a business transaction, and purchasing $\frac{3}{4}$ of a yard of fabric is a serious ordeal. She finished cutting the fabric and silently handed my friend her receipt, without so much of a glance up. Trying to be polite, I decided to sincerely tell this woman, "Thank you, have a good day!" because she wasn't saying anything to us, and she looked like she was either 'not having a great day' or she enjoys living in a perpetual state of blah. So, I wished her a good day with a smile, and she let out a noise that can only be described as a half grunt, half growl combination back at me. You would have thought I told her, "I hope you wake up tomorrow with mild to moderate back pain!" or "I hope you get jury duty!" instead of the fairly common expression "have a good day." I was taken aback by the growl/grunt, and my Competitive Nature left me wanting to forcefully declare, "no, you ARE going to have a great day, Ma'am!" but alas, I left thinking "Welp, I tried".

I say all of this not to attack this woman and boycott the store, but to show how we don't know people's back stories or how their day has played out so far, so why not try to be that light?

"You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden." Whether or not you intend for the light to shine, it does. As believers we have a precious gift of grace, mercy, and joy that we must show to the world. The magnetizing Light of Christ draws people in. This starts with believing. Becoming a believer means you choose to live your life above all else for Him. It is the complete 180 turnaround in your life where you run away from sin and into the arms of the Father. It's that proclamation and action. It's how you live inwardly, and the decisions that fill up your day. If you haven't made this decision, I highly recommend asking yourself what's holding you back.

After making this decision, you begin truly living for Him. While good deeds don't save us, we honor God by doing these good deeds to glorify Him. God has given each of us unique talents and qualities that we can use to disciple

others and ultimately bring Him glory. The question is just how will you apply your talents to bring others closer to Him. Our light was meant to be shown not concealed. In the final verse of today's reading verse 16 says, "in the same way let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven". As Christians, we possess one of the most encouraging and beautiful things and that is true joy. We can express this joy in everyday life through intentional conversations, deliberate actions, and evangelism. Professor Douglas Groothuis states, "because we belong to God, we should honor God in stewarding our resources—that is our bodies, our talents, our possessions, and our time."²⁵

I think it's important to recognize that both doing good deeds for God and doing things for God's glory are both good. Both result from you choosing to live your life for Christ. This is not a contrast of what is right versus what is wrong. One is personal and the other is your reflection of this light to others.

There is always something you can do to bring glory to the Father. Pray for someone, disciple a friend, smile at a stranger, be generous, show kindness, read your Bible. Focus on WHY you are doing these things, and your purpose in life. Now I am in no way claiming to be perfect at this. I am in high school. There are some days when I am an absolute grump for little to no reason. I wake up and unintentionally choose aggression. Do I want to feel like this? No. Does it still happen? Yes. We exist to glorify Him. God has given you everything. He has given you life! He has given you hope! So why not give Him all the glory in everything you do?

BIG IDEA: Remember to intentionally glorify God through your actions.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What do you think it means to do things for God vs. doing things for God's glory?
- **Question:** What are some personal talents and abilities you have to better glorify Him?

² Professor Douglas Groothuis of Denver Seminary in a Summit Ministries article titled 'Stewarding and Managing God's Resources'

Week 20: Matthew 5:13-16

Day 4: Flavor, Light, and Fragrance

READ: Matthew 5:13-16

EXPLORE:

This passage speaks to believers being the salt and light of the world. Let's start with salt. While today salt is mostly just used to enhance the flavor of food, in the first century world, it was used to add flavor, preserve food and purify sacrifices to the Lord. This made salt a very important commodity in the ancient world. So, what does it mean when Jesus tells us to be the salt of the world? It means that Christians are to preserve holiness, add flavor to the world around them, and purify righteous acts by living differently from the rest. Unfortunately, salt can lose its saltiness. It can be mixed with other things and diluted rendering it purposeless. When we mix with worldly things, we give up our influence in preserving holiness, adding value to our communities, and sanctifying our actions.

What about light? Of course, in the first century, light was not as simple to come by as flipping on a switch. So, when you found or created light in the dark, you would never cover or hide it because it was valuable. Jesus indicates how absurd it would be to hide a light. Nevertheless, Christians are often tempted to hide their light, which is Jesus, by giving into sin rather than living holy, surrendered lives. Jesus is calling Christians to live in a distinct way from the world, as distinct as light is from darkness, and to not shy away from shining bright.

When we live as salt and light, we declare to the world the goodness of God. 2 Corinthians 2:15 states, *"For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing."* We are the flavor, the light and the fragrance of Christ to this dark world to draw unbelievers into life with Christ. We ought to be living in such a way as to radically attract those who are far from God towards Him. Romans 14:8 states, *"For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."* As believers we belong to Christ, and it is our responsibility to live like it. Matthew 5:16 says, *"In the same way, let your light shine*

before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” The purpose of living for the Lord by loving God and loving others is to bring God glory and to show others that very glory. How are you living? Do people look at you and see Christ radiating through your words, your actions, your inactions, and your character? Is Christ undeniably living within and through you in such a way that no one can justify your behavior as just being a “good person” but can only attribute it to the glory of God?

BIG IDEA: We are the flavor, the light, and the fragrance of Christ to this dark world to draw unbelievers into life with Christ as they witness the glory of God through our righteous living.

Apply:

- **Question:** How is your life practically shining the light of Christ to those around you?

- **Question:** How is your life, which is lived for the glory of God and the good of others, actually resulting in others glorifying God in their own lives?

- **Activity:** Make a list of things in your life that are either sins or hinderances to others seeing the glory of God through your life (finances, greed, sexual sin, covetousness, loneliness, stress, anxiety, etc.). Take time to surrender each one to the Lord and ask Him to forgive you of your sin and to redeem your shortcomings or weaknesses for His glory and the good of others.

Week 20: Matthew 5:13-16

Day 5: A Day to Share | Salt and Light

READ TOGETHER: Ephesians 5:8 Isaiah 8:18, 1 Peter 4:11

***Instructions:** We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

In the mornings, I (Sabino) enjoy making scrambled eggs. I learned to make them by watching Gordon Ramsay. One of the key ingredients is of course salt, but it must be added at the appropriate time and not simply after the eggs are cooked. Ramsay's instruction is illuminating for a novice like me and helps me cook eggs that many people enjoy. In like manner, the light of instruction and the salt of the gospel make the world a better place.

Jesus tells his disciples that they are the salt of the earth. Salt is penetrating, quick and powerful. It gets in the food. In like manner, the salt of the gospel is meant to get into the world to reach the heart of man. Salt is cleansing, relishing, and a preservative. As we spread across the earth we cleanse, relish, and preserve. But if we lose our graces (virtues) how shall we be restored? The remedy for a saltless world is the church, but there is no remedy for flavorless salt. If we possess the Beatitudes in the Scripture above, we will be full of salt. Our lives and actions will permeate into the minds of those we encounter in our world. And like salt we must not be concentrated in only one small place but scattered over the whole earth for the good of all people.

Jesus also tells His disciples that they are the light of the world. Light is helpful, illuminating, and welcoming. Light shines forth and because we are light, we have many eyes upon us. Therefore, we must walk circumspectly. The apostles were obscure men before Christ called them, but when He put his light upon them they became known to all men. As the light of the world, we are meant to give light to others. The lightbulb should go off for people when they are around us. Truths that seem basic to us will be made profound to the world. They will be illuminated. Our great aim in letting our light shine before men is not for our own glory, but the glory of God. Because we are salt and light we rejoice most when God is glorified.

BIG IDEA: Salt and Light are the most valuable resources in the world. May they be powerfully used in and through your life.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What are some ways you have been salt and light in the world?

- **Question:** How does a Christian lose their saltiness and light?



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