

Small Group Guide – Week 41 Seek First the Kingdom of God

The Church at Brook Hills

October 11-17, 2010

Matthew 5-7

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is the first lengthy discourse we see in Matthew. Some have approached this teaching considering the standards it lays forth as so high that it must either describe the future ethic of heaven or an impossible moral code designed to drive people to lean on Christ for righteousness. Others from a less than Christian perspective have approached this passage as a sort of self-help manual treating the teachings as a list of instructions for the present. While there may continue to be differences of opinion, the central teaching we find in the Sermon on the Mount is consistent with the rest of the Bible and the core of the Gospel. God's people must realize the futility of their own pursuit of self-righteousness and seek God and his righteousness first, and above all other things.

- Who did Jesus address these words to in particular (5:1)?
- Does the audience of this sermon affect the way we understand it?

Study the Text . . .

Counter Culture

Jesus teaching as we see it here in the Matthew chapters 5-7 is strikingly counter to the cultural standards of the time in which he was teaching. In fact it remains counter cultural even today and in all cultures around the world. This passage opens with a set of pronouncements about blessings and those who receive them. These Beatitudes call those who mourn and are persecuted blessed. It was not a common thought that those who were reviled, persecuted, and recipients of all kinds of evil utterance were the blessed ones in the community.

- What does it mean to be poor in spirit (5:2)? Has there ever been a time when you thought of yourself as spiritually bankrupt?
- What does Jesus want his disciples to mourn over (5:4)?
- Have you ever been persecuted for righteousness sake (5:10)? When, where, why, how? How did you respond to that persecution (see 5:12 once people answer)?

Jesus also shocked those who were following him when he strayed from the historical norms. He did not stray by relaxing the laws they knew, but really he turned the dial up several notches in intensity. In Ch 5: 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43, he begins with a common teaching against the visible sins of the flesh and presses further to the heart issue which is the root of each one. Jesus is countering culture here because he is not looking at the outward expressions but is focused on the heart's desire that brings about such expressions.

- Have you ever had a sinful hatred in your heart toward another person (5:21-26)?

Small Group Guide – Week 41

Seek First the Kingdom of God

The Church at Brook Hills

October 11-17, 2010

Matthew 5-7

Have you ever thought of this as murder in the heart?

- Based on 5:27-30, do you think that there is a married adult in the world who has never committed adultery in their heart?
- Did Jesus ever have sinful anger in His heart? Did he ever look at another person with lustful intent? What are the implications of the perfections of Jesus for imperfect people like us (5:48)?

In Matt 5:20 Jesus told his disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, a measure by which many already fell short. A little later he says in Matt 5:48, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” If they thought exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees was out of reach then perfection with their heavenly Father must have jolted them. What could Jesus be talking about?

Even though we know perfection is beyond our reach, as followers of Christ we are called to reflect God’s glory and righteousness as we pursue Him and holiness. We are not given the option of complacency or disregard for the moral teachings of Christ. A believer above all others should be expected to display the behaviors Jesus describes in Matt Ch. 5 because believers operate on the overflow and outpouring of the love of the Holy Spirit in them. Because of Christ and his righteousness in us, we in a very real way have righteousness beyond that of the Pharisees and our pursuit of perfection is the overflow of the changed heart that drives us. In other words, we do not work for salvation, but from salvation. Because we have experienced the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, we want to grow in obedience to Him because we love Him. We want to be holy because He is holy.

- Do you have a deep desire to obey the commands of Christ in this sermon? Do you think your obedience earns you salvation, or do you think your desire for obedience gives evidence of your salvation? What’s the difference?
- Can God really change us at the heart level? How does He do that (regeneration= being born again, sanctification= progressive growth in holiness)?

Public or Private

Chapter 5 focused more on the outward expressions of behavior and how they are an indication of what is central in the heart. In Chapter 6, the focus shifts to the private practices of a life dependent on the Heavenly Father. Jesus addresses hypocritical practices of those who were displaying their religious rituals and traditions in the most public ways possible. The practices of prayer and fasting were intended to be about focusing on God. These hypocrites, although they carried out the motions of religious rites were only honoring themselves. Matt. 6:4, 6, and 18 all speak of the reward that will come from the Father when God’s people honor him in secret rather than themselves in public. In 6:3 Christ teaches we should take care to not even honor ourselves. Some may fall into the temptation to be honored by others, but an even more subtle temptation is to honor oneself even though others may not even know. The key to what Jesus is teaching is simple. We honor him when we do these things in secret knowing that he is the only one who sees and showing that he is our master.

- Do you think you have ever given to the poor (or anyone else) for your own glory

Small Group Guide – Week 41 Seek First the Kingdom of God

The Church at Brook Hills

October 11-17, 2010

Matthew 5-7

and praise rather than the glory and praise of God (6:1-4)?

- Do you think you have ever prayed in front of others in such a way that you were more conscience of what they thought of you than you were of actually talking to the Father (6:5-14)?

Seek First

Another of the greatest deterrents to focusing one's life on the God who created the whole world is the distraction of our simple needs. Sometimes it may feel as though Christ is the only one we want, but we feel there are needs we must give our time and attention to in order to simply survive. Christ teaches against this anxious worry with simple penetrating truth. In Matt. 6:25-34 Jesus asks, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Jesus clearly communicates that this is a faith issue. If we trusted God in faith, then our worry for these material needs would fade. Although they are good things and the Father knows we need them, they are not ours to worry about. Again we see the one focus of our life is to be on God, his kingdom and his righteousness. We are to seek Him first and he will take care of all our needs.

- If someone had access to your bank statement or checkbook (spending patterns) do you think they would conclude that you love God more than you love money and things (6:24)?
- Why do you work? Or, why are you currently in school? Is your only reason so that you can have food, drink, and clothing? Are you working or going to school because you want to glorify God? Are you working or going to school as a means to better love people, or to love people in a practical way? Do you think it is possible to work or go to school with an ungodly motive?
- Is your first priority in life the glory of God and the good of others?
- Do you think there is a connection between some peoples struggle with anxiety and their un-discerned sinful motives for working or going to school (6:24-34)?
- When you see your heart laid bare as Jesus does in this sermon, does it drive you to trust more in Christ or more in yourself (your righteousness or his)? Do you realize that Christ died not only for our external sins (murder, adultery/sexual immorality, theft, lies, etc.), but also for our heart sins (anger, lust, covetousness, greed, idolatry)?

Concluding Group Discussion . . .

- Who do you typically think of as blessed? What about them makes you think of them that way? How might you need to change your concept of blessing in light of Matt 5:11-12?
- When the Spirit convicts you and you identify sins in your life, how do you respond? Do you contrive methods to avoid the visible sins or do you press deeper into the heart issue? What is the desire/craving that led to the sinful action?
- Where does righteousness come from? What are some other scriptures that correspond with your answers?
- If you evaluated your prayer life, would it indicate you are focused on receiving honor from others, feeling good about yourself, or honoring God the Father?

Small Group Guide – Week 41

Seek First the Kingdom of God

The Church at Brook Hills

October 11-17, 2010

Matthew 5-7

- Do you find yourself seeking your own glory or God's?
- What distracts you as you seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness? What does that say about your faith? Is there evidence that you trust God to provide all that you need?