



the grass withers
and the flowers fade

B U T

THE WORD OF OUR GOD

S T A N D S

F O R E V E R

ISAIAH 40:8



Presented to

by

on the occasion of

date

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Welcome!



Congratulations! You are holding in your hands the best-selling book in the history of humanity—the Bible. It was given to us by God thousands of years ago. Although the Bible has been around for some time, the wisdom and knowledge contained within is still relevant today. In fact, everything you need to know about God and life is found in the pages of this book. It is the “user’s manual of life” that we all have been searching for.

The Bible does not just teach us about life, though. It also shows us how to come into a *personal* relationship with the very God who inspired this book. This particular Bible contains features that have been specially designed to help you understand, discover, and deepen the personal relationship that God wants to have with you.

Perhaps you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, but you want to know more about Christianity. You may even want to be a believer, but you just don’t know how to become one. In the *How to Find God New Testament* you will find a section entitled “How You Can Know God” (p. A1). Here, you will learn how to establish a life-changing relationship with Jesus.

Maybe you have just started in the Christian faith. You are a new believer. Here you will find out how to lay a good foundation for your faith and walk with God in the years ahead.

You may even be a believer who is mature in the faith. Here you will be refreshed and reminded of the essentials of the Christian faith and life.

THE MAIN FEATURES

How to Find God contains four reading tracks: “Cornerstones,” “First Steps,” “Off and Running,” and “Big Questions.” Each reading track (except “Big Questions”) is composed of two kinds of notes: *up-front* and *in-text*. The up-front notes appear before the Bible text and are made up of one to two paragraphs and two to eight numbered points that refer you to Scripture passages and their accompanying in-text notes.

READING TRACK ONE: CORNERSTONES

Cornerstones—blocks of stone—were traditionally used to start a building’s foundation. Likewise, the “Cornerstones” reading track helps you to begin to lay a solid foundation for your faith. Here you will learn about God’s character, Jesus’ life, and the Holy Spirit’s role in the lives of believers. “Cornerstones” also contains notes on the essential Christian character traits that are developed and nurtured by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Some of those traits are love, forgiveness, purity, honesty, wisdom, peace, and joy.

READING TRACK TWO: **FIRST STEPS**

The phrase *first steps* brings to mind the image of a young child taking his or her first unassisted steps. Like this young child, new believers in Christ need to learn how to walk all over again, so to speak. That is because the Christian life for most people is a completely new way of living. To help you learn to live this new life, the “First Steps” reading track gives you valuable building blocks for growing in your faith. Here you will discover the importance of and the “how to” of studying the Bible, praying, finding the right church, resisting temptation, and seeking God’s will for your life.

READING TRACK THREE: **OFF AND RUNNING**

“How does God’s Word apply to my everyday life?” This is one of the most widely asked questions about the Bible today. The “Off and Running” reading track answers this question. Here you will discover how to put your faith into action. You will see what the Bible has to say about important topics like marriage, parenting, priorities, conversation, and job performance. By helping you apply biblical principles to these aspects of your life, “Off and Running” takes you to the next level of the Christian life—living it day to day.

READING TRACK FOUR: **BIG QUESTIONS**

Life often presents us with difficult situations that cause us to ask hard questions. For instance, you may wonder how a good God could let something bad—like cancer—happen to you. Or you may wonder why Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Aren’t other religions just as good? In the “Big Questions” reading track, you will find out what the Bible has to say about tough issues. Everything from alternative lifestyles to the second coming of Christ is covered here.

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

Also included in this *New Believer’s New Testament* are two features that will help you better understand the Bible and live out your faith. These features are:

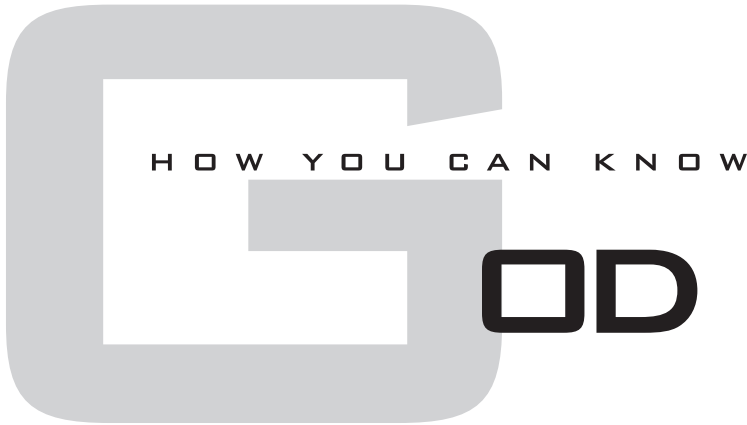
- *How to Study the Bible*—a practical way for you to read through the Bible and a list of questions to ask yourself as you read.
- *Topical Index*—a list of various topics that are of special interest to believers, along with a list of verses that address each topic.

HOW TO USE THE READING TRACKS

The *New Believer’s New Testament* is easy to use. Simply turn to page A11 and begin reading the “Who Is God?” up-front note in the “Cornerstones” reading track. Look up the Scripture passages and in-text notes referred to at the end of this note. After you have read all the Scripture passages and in-text notes for “Who Is God?” move on to the next up-front note (“Who Is Jesus?”) and begin the process over again.

You can read one up-front note and its Scripture passages and in-text notes a day. Or, if you prefer, browse through the table of contents and choose the topic(s) that interests you the most for your daily reading.

Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise.” God wants his Word to permeate every area of your life—your home, your business, your play time as well as your prayer time. So open your Bible and your heart, and God will speak to you from these pages. Don’t let anything keep you from spending time each day in God’s Word.



HOW YOU CAN KNOW GOD



What Is Missing in Our Lives?

Purpose, meaning, a reason for living—these are all things we desire and search for in life. Despite steps each one of us takes to find purpose and meaning in life, we still feel empty, unfulfilled. That is because there is a spiritual emptiness in each of our lives. We each have a hole in our heart, a spiritual vacuum deep within our soul—a “God-shaped blank.” Possessions won’t fill this hole, nor will success. Relationships alone cannot satisfy this emptiness, and morality, in and of itself, falls miserably short of occupying this space. In fact, even religion cannot fill the void in our heart.

There is only one way to effectively fill that void. This way will not only help us to have a life that is full and rich on this earth, but—more important—will give us the absolute hope of spending eternity in the presence of God. Before we can truly appreciate this good news though, we need to understand the bad news, which is a serious problem we all have.

THE PROBLEM: SIN

The Bible clearly identifies our serious problem as sin. Sin is not just an act but the actual nature of our being. In other words, we are not sinners because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners! We are born with a nature to do wrong. King David, the Old Testament Israelite ruler, wrote, “For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Because we are born sinners, sinning comes to all of us naturally. That is why it is futile to think that the answer to all of life’s problems comes from “within.” According to the Bible, the *problem* is within! Scripture tells us, “The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

We are not basically good—we are basically sinful. This sinfulness spills out into everything we do. Every problem we experience in our society today can be traced back to our refusal to live God's way. Clear back to the Garden of Eden, Adam made his choice, and he suffered the consequences of it, setting the pattern that all humanity would follow. The Bible explains, "When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. . . . Yes, Adam's one sin brought condemnation upon everyone" (Romans 5:12, 18).

"That's not fair!" you may protest. Why should we suffer because of what someone else has done? Yet, given the opportunity, each one of us would have done the same thing as Adam. In fact, not a single day passes that we do not face the same test that was set before Adam. God has given us the freedom to choose between two separate paths: the path that leads to life and the path that leads to death. The Bible says, "Today, I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make, Oh, that you would choose life, that you and your descendants might live!" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

WITHOUT A LEG TO STAND ON

Someone may say, "But I live a good life. I try to be kind and considerate to others. I live by the Ten Commandments." But the truth of the matter is that the Ten Commandments, or the law, as they are called in the Bible, were not given to make us good but to show us how bad we are. The Bible tells us, "No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what his law commands. For the more we know God's law, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying it" (Romans 3:20). The purpose of the law is to make us realize how sinful we are. You might say that God's law was given to "shut our mouths" and show us that we desperately need his help and forgiveness for our terminal condition as sinners.

Look at the passages below to get a better understanding of the nature and seriousness of sin.

1. We Have All Missed the Mark (see Romans 3:23, p. 178). Romans 3:23 says, we have *all* sinned. For those that would claim to be the sole exception to this eternal truth, verse ten of this chapter plainly says, "No one is good—not even one (Romans 3:10). Another word for *good* is *righteous*. The word *righteous* means, "One who is as he or she ought to be." When the Bible says that no one is righteous, or good, it is not so much referring to behavior but to inner character.

What exactly is "God's glorious standard" that Romans 3:23 says we have failed to meet? God's "glorious standard" is absolute perfection. Jesus said, "But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). In other words, anyone who is not as good as God is not acceptable to him.

One definition of *sin*, derived from the Greek word *hamartia*, is to "miss the mark." As far as the mark of perfection goes, we miss it by a mile. Although our sinful nature makes it impossible for us to live up to God's standard, we cannot blame sin on our nature alone. Sin is also a deliberate act.

2. Sin Is a Deliberate Act (see Ephesians 2:1-3, p. 238). Another word for *sins* in Ephesians 2:1 is *transgressions* or *trespasses*. This word speaks of a lapse or deviation from truth. In contrast to simply "missing the mark," this is a deliberate action. Because sin is a deliberate action, we cannot blame our sin on our society or our environment or our mental or physical state. Everyone has chosen to do what was wrong. If we protest this point, "we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth" (1 John 1:8).

3. The Ultimate Penalty for Sin Is Death (see Romans 6:23, p. 182). According to the Bible, we have offended a Holy God. We have not done this once or twice, but so many times that we are unable to keep count. Romans 6:23 says, “The *wages* of sin is death. . . .” *Wages* are something that you are paid for work rendered. In other words, you earn your wages. Because we have all repeatedly sinned, we have earned the penalty of death, which is eternal torment and punishment in a place called hell.

Amid all this talk about sin and death, there is some good news. God has given us a way to escape the penalty of our sin. He has made it possible for us to have a relationship with him and enjoy the hope of eternal life without punishment.



The Solution: Jesus Christ

God understood our problem and knew that we could do nothing about it. Because God loves us, he sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to bridge the chasm of sin that separates us from him.

WHY JESUS CAN BRIDGE THE GAP

There has never been anyone like Jesus. For starters, Jesus was not conceived in the womb of his mother through natural means. Rather, he was supernaturally conceived in the womb of a young

virgin named Mary. Because of his supernatural conception, Jesus, who is wholly God, also became wholly human.

Though Jesus is God, he chose to lay aside the privileges of his deity to live on earth as a man. The Bible, describing the sacrifice Christ made in becoming a man, says that Jesus “made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal’s death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7-8). It is extremely important to note that Jesus did not cease to be God when he came to earth. He simply laid aside his divine privileges and walked the earth as a man. In doing so, he was personally able to experience the gamut of human emotions, ranging from happiness to deep sorrow. He felt what it was like to be tired, cold, and hungry.

Moreover, he came to this earth with a clear objective in mind: to bridge that gap between us and God.

When the Israelites of the Old Testament sinned, they would have the high priest go into the Temple and offer an animal sacrifice to God to atone for their sins. In a symbolic sense, this was a way of putting one’s sins on the animal, which stood in the place of the guilty person. The Bible teaches, “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22).

The sacrificial rituals carried out by the Israelites in the Old Testament foreshadowed what Jesus would do when he came to this earth. He took the sin of the world upon himself when he hung on the cross so many years ago.

Numerous Old Testament prophecies pointed not only to his birth and life but also to his death, including the way in which he would die.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS OF THE FAITH



Who Is God?

Thousands of years ago, Pharaoh, the Egyptian ruler, posed a question people are still asking today: “Who is the LORD that I should listen to him?” That’s a good question, but it is not an easy subject to tackle. It is difficult for our limited minds to grasp the limitless, eternal God. It has been said, “If God were small enough for your minds, he wouldn’t be big enough for your needs.” For that reason, don’t be exasperated if you can’t fully understand who God is or why he does certain things. One day, Scripture promises, everything about God and his character will be made perfectly clear to us (1 Corinthians 13:12). But until then, we will find everything we need to know about him in his Word. Look up the following notes and passages to find out who God is.

- 1. God Is All-Knowing, Ever Present, and All-Powerful.** The Creator of the Universe knows every intimate detail of his creation (see Matthew 10:29-31, p.15).
- 2. God Is Holy.** God’s incomparable holiness merits our worship (see Revelation 15:2-4, p. 343).
- 3. God Is Loving and Just.** God’s justice is tempered by his love (see 2 Peter 3:3-9, p. 314).
- 4. God Is Personal.** This characteristic of God sets him apart from the so-called “gods” of other religions (see Acts 17:22-31, p. 162).
- 5. God Is in Control.** It is important to remember that God is still in control, even if things around us seem to be in chaos (see Romans 11:33-36, p. 191).
- 6. The God of the Bible Is the One True God.** While some insist on the existence of many gods, only the God of the Bible is the true, living God, worthy of our devotion (see 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, p. 206).



Who Is Jesus?

Throughout history many people have attempted to answer this question. Some have done so accurately, but many have not. Our best source for answering this question is—once again—God’s own Word. The Bible presents us with some inescapable truths about Jesus that demand a response. Anyone who seriously studies Scripture to learn more about Jesus must answer two probing questions:

(1) What do you think of Jesus Christ? and (2) Who is he? The writer C. S. Lewis made this observation: “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to” (*Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. [New York: Macmillan, 1952], 41).

Jesus was not just a good man. He was—and is—the God-man. Let’s examine what the Bible has to say about Jesus.

1. **Jesus Is Human.** Jesus became our supreme example as God in human form (see Philip-
pians 2:5-11, p. 248).
2. **Jesus Is Divine.** Even though Jesus became human, he still remained God (see Colos-
sians 1:15-20, p. 254).
3. **Jesus Had a Specific Mission to Accomplish.** Jesus came to save humankind from
sin (see Luke 4:16-21, p. 70).
4. **Jesus Made the Ultimate Sacrifice.** Jesus endured tremendous pain so that we
could enjoy eternity with him (see 1 Peter 2:24, p. 307).
5. **Jesus Has Great Power to Transform People.** Jesus can change the most unlikely
person into one of the most powerful witnesses on his behalf (see Acts 4:13, p. 140).
6. **Jesus Has an Eternal Dominion.** Jesus’ Kingdom extends beyond the boundaries of
space and time (see Revelation 1:4-8, p. 332).



Who Is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the most mysterious member of the Trinity, which includes God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Spirit (or the Holy Spirit). Many struggle with the idea of God being three persons, yet one. Quite honestly, we will never fully grasp the concept this side of heaven.

Some, however, have wrongly thought of the Holy Spirit as more of an “it” than a “him.” That is probably due in part to biblical descriptions of him as being like the wind or coming upon Jesus in the form of a dove, among other comparisons.

Yet these descriptions must be balanced with the descriptions of the other members of the Trinity. For instance, Jesus referred to himself as “the bread of life” and “the good shepherd.” In the same way, God the Father is referred to as “a refuge” and “a consuming fire.” Does this mean that Jesus is a loaf of bread or a sheep farmer, or that the Father is a pile of rocks or a blast furnace? Of course not! These are simply metaphors used in Scripture to help communicate God’s character. Likewise, the unique descriptions attributed to the Holy Spirit do not imply that the Holy Spirit is merely some “force” or “power.” Jesus said this about the Holy Spirit: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. . . . He will tell you about the future” (John 16:13). Note the use of the pronoun *he*. The Holy Spirit has a distinct personality, and he also has specific work that he wants to do in our lives as followers of Jesus Christ. Explore what the Bible says about him.

1. **Who the Holy Spirit Helps.** The Holy Spirit strengthens and empowers followers of Christ (see Acts 2:1-40, p. 136).
2. **How the Holy Spirit Works with the Father and the Son.** The Holy Spirit works alongside God the Father and Jesus, God’s Son, to make our lives pleasing to God (see 1 Peter 1:2, p. 306).
3. **Why God Gives Us the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives is God’s mark of ownership (see Ephesians 1:13-14, p. 238).
4. **How the Holy Spirit Works in Our Lives.** The Holy Spirit draws us to Christ, enters our life at conversion, and empowers us as we allow him to work in our life (see John 14:15-17, p. 126).
5. **When the Holy Spirit Can Be Sinned Against.** There are six specific ways we can sin against the Holy Spirit (see Acts 5:1-10, p. 142).
6. **Why Christians Need the Holy Spirit.** Living the Christian life is impossible without the Holy Spirit’s help (see Galatians 5:16-26, p. 230).



Who Is the Devil?

What is the Devil like? Does he really look like the red-suited, pitchfork-holding cartoon caricature seated on a throne in hell? Or does he roam through the earth disguised as an angel of light?

Unfortunately, far too many people do not have an accurate view of who the Devil is. Many underestimate him and his prowess, even going as far as to doubt his very existence. Someone once asked the great evangelist

Charles Finney, “Mr. Finney, do you believe in a literal Devil?” Finney replied, “You try opposing him for a while, and you see if he’s literal or not.” You will find out how literal the Devil is the moment you make a commitment to Jesus Christ.

The Bible clearly shows us just how active and conniving the Devil really

Matthew

CHAPTER 1

The Record of Jesus' Ancestors

This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of King David and of Abraham:

- 2 Abraham was the father of Isaac.
Isaac was the father of Jacob.
Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.
- 3 Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (their mother was Tamar).
Perez was the father of Hezron.
Hezron was the father of Ram.*
- 4 Ram was the father of Amminadab.
Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.
Nahshon was the father of Salmon.
- 5 Salmon was the father of Boaz (his mother was Rahab).
Boaz was the father of Obed (his mother was Ruth).
Obed was the father of Jesse.
- 6 Jesse was the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon (his mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).
- 7 Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.
Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.
Abijah was the father of Asaph.*
- 8 Asaph was the father of Jehoshaphat.
Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.*
Jehoram was the father* of Uzziah.
- 9 Uzziah was the father of Jotham.
Jotham was the father of Ahaz.
Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.
- 10 Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.
Manasseh was the father of Amos.*

Amos was the father of Josiah.

- 11 Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin* and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon).
- 12 After the Babylonian exile:
Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.
Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.
- 13 Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.
Abiud was the father of Eliakim.
Eliakim was the father of Azor.
- 14 Azor was the father of Zadok.
Zadok was the father of Akim.
Akim was the father of Eliud.
- 15 Eliud was the father of Eleazar.
Eleazar was the father of Matthan.
Matthan was the father of Jacob.
- 16 Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.
Mary was the mother of Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to King David, and fourteen from David's time to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

¹⁸Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Joseph, her fiancé, being a just man, decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace her publicly.

²⁰As he considered this, he fell asleep, and an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.

1:3 Greek *Aram*; also in 1:4. See 1 Chr 2:9-10. 1:7 *Asaph* is the same person as *Asa*; also in 1:8. See 1 Chr 3:10. 1:8a Greek *Joram*. See 1 Kgs 22:50 and note at 1 Chr 3:11. 1:8b *Or ancestor*; also in 1:11. 1:10 *Amos* is the same person as *Amon*. See 1 Chr 3:14. 1:11 Greek *Jeconiah*; also in 1:12. See 2 Kgs 24:6 and note at 1 Chr 3:16.

“Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to go ahead with your marriage to Mary. For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,* for he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All of this happened to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

²³ “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and he will be called Immanuel*
(meaning, God is with us).”

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord commanded. He brought Mary home to be his wife, ²⁵but she remained a virgin until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

CHAPTER 2

The Visit of the Wise Men

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men* from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ²“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We have seen his star as it arose,* and we have come to worship him.”

³Herod was deeply disturbed by their question, as was all of Jerusalem. ⁴He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law. “Where did the prophets say the Messiah would be born?” he asked them.

⁵“In Bethlehem,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶ ‘O Bethlehem of Judah,
you are not just a lowly village in Judah,
for a ruler will come from you
who will be the shepherd for my people
Israel.’* ”

⁷Then Herod sent a private message to the wise men, asking them to come see him. At this meeting he learned the exact time when they first saw the star. ⁸Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

⁹After this interview the wise men went their way. Once again the star appeared to them, guiding them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were filled with

joy! ¹¹They entered the house where the child and his mother, Mary, were, and they fell down before him and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²But when it was time to leave, they went home another way, because God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

The Escape to Egypt

¹³After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up and flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to try to kill the child.” ¹⁴That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, ¹⁵and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”*

¹⁶Herod was furious when he learned that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, because the wise men had told him the star first appeared to them about two years earlier.* ¹⁷Herod’s brutal action fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah:

¹⁸ “A cry of anguish is heard in Ramah—
weeping and mourning unrestrained.
Rachel weeps for her children,
refusing to be comforted—for they are
dead.”*

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and told him, ²⁰“Get up and take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.” ²¹So Joseph returned immediately to Israel with Jesus and his mother. ²²But when he learned that the new ruler was Herod’s son Archelaus, he was afraid. Then, in another dream, he was warned to go to Galilee. ²³So they went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what was spoken by the prophets concerning the Messiah: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

CHAPTER 3

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

In those days John the Baptist began preaching in the Judean wilderness. His message was,

1:21 *Jesus* means “The Lord saves.” 1:23 Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10. 2:1 Or *royal astrologers*; Greek reads *Magi*; also in 2:7, 16. 2:2 Or *in the east*. 2:6 Mic 5:2; 2 Sam 5:2. 2:15 Hos 11:1. 2:16 Or *according to the time he calculated from the wise men*. 2:18 Jer 31:15.

2“Turn from your sins and turn to God, because the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*” 3Isaiah had spoken of John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness:
‘Prepare a pathway for the Lord’s coming!
Make a straight road for him!’”*

4John’s clothes were woven from camel hair, and he wore a leather belt; his food was locusts and wild honey. 5People from Jerusalem and from every section of Judea and from all over the Jordan Valley went out to the wilderness to hear him preach. 6And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

7But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptized, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee God’s coming judgment? 8Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God. 9Don’t just say, ‘We’re safe—we’re the descendants of Abraham.’ That proves nothing. God can change these stones here into children of Abraham. 10Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever your roots. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

11“I baptize with* water those who turn from their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is far greater than I am—so much greater that I am not even worthy to be his slave.* He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.* 12He is ready to separate the chaff from the grain with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, storing the grain in his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”

The Baptism of Jesus

13Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. 14But John didn’t want to baptize him. “I am the one who needs to be baptized by you,” he said, “so why are you coming to me?”

15But Jesus said, “It must be done, because we must do everything that is right.*” So then John baptized him.

16After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. 17And a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with him.”

CHAPTER 4

The Temptation of Jesus

Then Jesus was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted there by the Devil. 2For forty days and forty nights he ate nothing and became very hungry. 3Then the Devil* came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, change these stones into loaves of bread.”

4But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say,

‘People need more than bread for their life;
they must feed on every word of God.’* ”

5Then the Devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, 6and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

‘He orders his angels to protect you.
And they will hold you with their hands
to keep you from striking your foot on a
stone.’* ”

7Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘Do not test the Lord your God.’* ”

8Next the Devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him the nations of the world and all their glory. 9“I will give it all to you,” he said, “if you will only kneel down and worship me.”

10“Get out of here, Satan,” Jesus told him. “For the Scriptures say,

‘You must worship the Lord your God;
serve only him.’* ”

11Then the Devil went away, and angels came and cared for Jesus.

The Ministry of Jesus Begins

12When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee. 13But instead of going to Nazareth, he went to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14This fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy:

15 “In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali,
beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River—
in Galilee where so many Gentiles live—
16 the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light.
And for those who lived in the land where
death casts its shadow,
a light has shined.”*

17From then on, Jesus began to preach, “Turn

3:2 Or has come or is coming soon. 3:3 Isa 40:3. 3:11a Or in. 3:11b Greek to carry his sandals. 3:11c Or in the Holy Spirit and in fire.

3:15 Or we must fulfill all righteousness. 4:3 Greek the tempter. 4:4 Deut 8:3. 4:6 Ps 91:11-12. 4:7 Deut 6:16. 4:10 Deut 6:13. 4:15-16 Isa 9:1-2.

from your sins and turn to God, because the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*"

The First Disciples

¹⁸One day as Jesus was walking along the shore beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—fishing with a net, for they were commercial fishermen. ¹⁹Jesus called out to them, "Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people!" ²⁰And they left their nets at once and went with him.

²¹A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, mending their nets. And he called them to come, too. ²²They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee

²³Jesus traveled throughout Galilee teaching in the synagogues, preaching everywhere the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed people who had every kind of sickness and disease. ²⁴News about him spread far beyond the borders of Galilee so that the sick were soon coming to be healed from as far away as Syria. And whatever their illness and pain, or if they were possessed by demons, or were epileptics, or were paralyzed—he healed them all. ²⁵Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns,* Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.

CHAPTER 5

The Sermon on the Mount

One day as the crowds were gathering, Jesus went up the mountainside with his disciples and sat down to teach them.

4:17 Or has come or is coming soon. 4:25 Greek Decapolis. 5:3 Greek the poor in spirit.

The Beatitudes

²This is what he taught them:

- ³ "God blesses those who realize their need for him,* for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them.
- ⁴ God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- ⁵ God blesses those who are gentle and lowly, for the whole earth will belong to them.
- ⁶ God blesses those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for they will receive it in full.
- ⁷ God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
- ⁸ God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.
- ⁹ God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.
- ¹⁰ God blesses those who are persecuted because they live for God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

¹¹"God blesses you when you are mocked and persecuted and lied about because you are my followers. ¹²Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted, too.

Teaching about Salt and Light

¹³"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. ¹⁴You are the light of the world—like a city on a mountain, glowing in

OFF AND RUNNING

We Need to Recognize Our True Condition

Read MATTHEW 5:3-5



Jesus shows us the way to true happiness in this text. Interestingly, not a word is said about seeking "personal fulfillment." Here Jesus gives us a three-step prescription to spiritual health and happiness:

1. See Yourself as You Really Are. When you realize your need for God (verse 3),

you see yourself as you really are: a sinner, in desperate need of God's forgiveness. This is the first "rung on the ladder." The phrase "need for God" in this verse comes from a verb meaning "to shrink, cower, or cringe," as beggars often did in that day. It speaks of someone who is destitute and completely dependent on others for help. Therefore, to "realize your need for God" is to admit that you are spiritually destitute apart from God.

2. Take Action. Another way to translate verse 4 is "happy are the unhappy." Because we see ourselves as we really are, we mourn over, or are sorry for, our condition. This leads us to begin making changes in our

the night for all to see. ¹⁵Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. ¹⁶In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

Teaching about the Law

¹⁷Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to fulfill them. ¹⁸I assure you, until heaven and earth disappear, even the smallest detail of God's law will remain until its purpose is achieved. ¹⁹So if you break the smallest commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

²⁰But I warn you—unless you obey God better than the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees do, you can't enter the Kingdom of Heaven at all!

Teaching about Anger

²¹You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.'^{*} ²²But I say, if you are angry with someone,^{*} you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot,^{*} you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone,^{*} you are in danger of the fires of hell.

²³So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has some-

thing against you, ²⁴leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. ²⁵Come to terms quickly with your enemy before it is too late and you are dragged into court, handed over to an officer, and thrown in jail. ²⁶I assure you that you won't be free again until you have paid the last penny.

Teaching about Adultery

²⁷You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not commit adultery.'^{*} ²⁸But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹So if your eye—even if it is your good eye^{*}—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your hand—even if it is your stronger hand^{*}—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Teaching about Divorce

³¹You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a letter of divorce.'^{*} ³²But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Teaching about Vows

³³Again, you have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.'^{*} ³⁴But I say,

5:21 Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17. 5:22a Greek *your brother*; also in 5:23. Some manuscripts add *without cause*. 5:22b Greek uses an Aramaic term of contempt: *If you say to your brother, 'Raca.'* 5:22c Greek *if you say, 'You fool.'* 5:27 Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18. 5:29 Greek *your right eye*. 5:30 Greek *your right hand*. 5:31 Deut 24:1. 5:33 Num 30:2.

lives. Scripture tells us, "For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation. We will never regret that kind of sorrow. But sorrow without repentance is the kind that results in death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Our true sorrow will lead to joy—salvation in Jesus Christ. But without that sorrow, there will be no joy.

3. Pursue Meekness. Seeing ourselves as we really are produces two vital spiritual qualities: gentleness and lowliness (verse 5). We are no longer inflated with pride. We have an accurate and honest assessment of ourselves that, in turn, affects how we approach others. This contradicts the world's way of thinking, which advocates standing up for your rights and asserting yourself in order to get "your piece of the pie." The meekness Jesus describes here is not some sort of weakness or cowardice, but rather "power under constraint," much like a powerful stallion submitting to the control of the bit.

The more we humble ourselves and admit our weaknesses, the more we will rely on God's grace—and the happier we will be with ourselves and others.

Beware of the Sins of the Heart Read MATTHEW 5:27-30

Some people have the mistaken notion that unless you commit the act of adultery, you have not really sinned. They think it is OK to fantasize about or look at someone, so long as you don't become involved in a sinful relationship with that person. But Jesus "cuts to the chase" in this passage. He lets us know that even a lustful glance is as sinful as committing the act of adultery.

In the original Greek, one of the meanings for the word Jesus uses for "look" is intentional and repeated gazing. Jesus' remedy for someone who has a problem in this area seems rather harsh, but you really have to look at the context and the culture of the day to understand this radical but important statement.

In the Jewish culture, the right eye and the right hand were thought of as the best one had. The right eye represented one's best vision and the right hand represented one's best skills. In essence, Jesus is saying that you should be willing to give up whatever is necessary to keep you from falling into this sin. That may mean terminating a relationship, canceling a cable channel or magazine subscription, or changing how or where you spend your spare time. In other words, remove yourself from those things that can have a spiritually destructive effect on your life. Then take practical steps to fill your mind with the things of God: "Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise" (Philippians 4:8).



CORNER STONES

don't make any vows! If you say, 'By heaven!' it is a sacred vow because heaven is God's throne. ³⁵And if you say, 'By the earth!' it is a sacred vow because the earth is his footstool. And don't swear, 'By Jerusalem!' for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. ³⁶Don't even swear, 'By my head!' for you can't turn one hair white or black. ³⁷Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Your word is enough. To strengthen your promise with a vow shows that something is wrong.*

Teaching about Revenge

³⁸"You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'If an eye is injured, injure the eye of the person who did it. If a tooth gets knocked out, knock out the tooth of the person who did it.'* ³⁹But I say, don't resist an evil person! If you are slapped on the right cheek, turn the other, too. ⁴⁰If you are ordered to court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. ⁴¹If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile,* carry it two miles. ⁴²Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.

Teaching about Love for Enemies

⁴³"You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Love your neighbor'* and hate your enemy.

⁴⁴But I say, love your enemies!* Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too. ⁴⁶If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷If you are kind only to your friends,* how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. ⁴⁸But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

CHAPTER 6

Teaching about Giving to the Needy

"Take care! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired, because then you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. ²When you give a gift to someone in need, don't shout about it as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I assure you, they have received all the reward they will ever get. ³But when you give to someone, don't tell your left hand what your right hand is doing. ⁴Give

5:37 Or *Anything beyond this is from the evil one.* 5:38 Greek 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21.

5:41 Greek *million* [4,854 feet or 1,478 meters]. 5:43 Lev 19:18. 5:44 Some manuscripts add *Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you.* 5:47 Greek *your brothers.*

your gifts in secret, and your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.

Teaching about Prayer and Fasting

⁵“And now about prayer. When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I assure you, that is all the reward they will ever get. ⁶But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father secretly. Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.

⁷“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered only by repeating their words again and again. ⁸Don’t be like them, because your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! ⁹Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,
may your name be honored.

¹⁰ May your Kingdom come soon.

May your will be done here on earth,
just as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us our food for today,*

¹² and forgive us our sins,
just as we have forgiven those who have
sinned against us.

¹³ And don’t let us yield to temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.*

¹⁴“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

¹⁶“And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, who try to look pale and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I assure you, that is the only reward they will ever get. ¹⁷But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. ¹⁸Then no one will suspect you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in secret. And your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.

Teaching about Money and Possessions

¹⁹“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰Store your treasures in heaven, where they will never become moth-eaten or rusty and where they will

^{6:11} Or for tomorrow. ^{6:13} Or from evil. Some manuscripts add For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Prayer Was Modeled for Us by Christ

Read MATTHEW 6:5-15

You have probably heard what has been called “the Lord’s Prayer.” Jesus gave us this particular prayer to show us *how* to pray. Incidentally, just because we call this prayer “the Lord’s Prayer” does not mean that Jesus prayed it for himself. He had no reason to ask for forgiveness because he never sinned. Instead, it is more accurate to call this prayer “the Disciples’ Prayer,” for it was given by Jesus as a response to the disciples’ request, “Lord, teach us how to pray.”

To better understand this prayer, we can break it down into two sets of petitions:

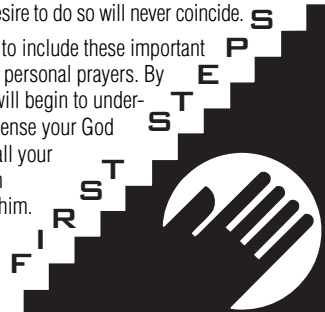
The first three petitions focus on the glory of God.

- “Our Father in heaven”: Recognize that you are addressing a holy God who sees you as his child.
- “May your name be honored”: Begin your prayers with reverence and praise to God for who he is. This will enable you to put your needs or problems in their proper perspective.
- “May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven”: Ask God for his will to reign supreme in your life. You cannot pray “your Kingdom come” until you pray “my kingdom go.”

The second three petitions focus on our personal needs.

- “Give us our food for today”: Make your physical and personal needs known to God. Remember, Scripture tells us that God will provide for all of our needs (see Philippians 4:19, p. 251).
- “And forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us”: Confess your sins to God. Psalm 66:18 says, “If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, my Lord would not have listened.” If you are clinging to some sin, your prayer life will come to a screeching halt.
- “And don’t let us yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”: Recognize your inclination to fall into sin, and pray that the opportunity to sin and the desire to do so will never coincide.

Make it a point to include these important aspects in your personal prayers. By doing so, you will begin to understand how immense your God is and how small your problems are in comparison to him.



Forgiveness Is Not Selective Read MATTHEW 5:43-48

As one Bible commentator has put it, “To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human. To return good for evil is divine.” Although we are not divine, we, as believers, do not have the liberty to choose whom we will forgive and not forgive. This means that we must do as Jesus has commanded and not only forgive our enemies, but love them as well.

Loving our enemies is certainly something that does not come easily—or naturally. In fact, if we wait for some feeling of love to suddenly overtake us, it simply won’t happen. We must begin to pray for our enemies even before we are conscious of loving them. This is absolutely impossible to do apart from the help of the Holy Spirit. If you feel you fall short in the area of forgiveness, take heart. The Bible is full of examples of that “divine” ability to forgive, which can only come from the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives:

- God’s Spirit enabled Abraham to give the best land to his traveling partner and nephew, Lot (Genesis 13:1-12).
- God’s Spirit gave Joseph the ability to embrace and kiss the very brothers who had sold him into slavery (Genesis 45:1-15).
- God’s Spirit kept David from taking advantage of an opportunity to kill King Saul, who was then seeking David’s life (1 Samuel 24).
- God’s Spirit caused Stephen (the first Christian martyr) to pray for those who were stoning him to death (see Acts 7:59-60, p. 147).

The ultimate example of forgiving one’s enemies, however, comes from Jesus. He clearly modeled this principle for us when, while hanging on the cross, he prayed,

“Father, forgive these people, because they don’t know what they are doing” (see Luke 23:34, p. 104). If the cruel torture of crucifixion would not silence Jesus’ prayer for his enemies, what pain, prejudice, or unfair treatment could justify the silencing of our prayers for our enemies? Just as God’s Spirit worked in the lives of the individuals above, he will enable you to love, pray, and do good to those who hate and hurt you.



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be safe from thieves. ²¹Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be.

²²Your eye is a lamp for your body. A pure eye lets sunshine into your soul. ²³But an evil eye shuts out the light and plunges you into darkness. If the light you think you have is really darkness, how deep that darkness will be!

²⁴No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

²⁵So I tell you, don’t worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn’t life consist of more than food and clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds. They don’t need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than they are.

²⁷Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not.

²⁸And why worry about your clothes? Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, ²⁹yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ³⁰And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won’t he more surely care for you? You have so little faith!

³¹So don’t worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. ³²Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, ³³and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.

³⁴So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

CHAPTER 7

Don't Condemn Others

"Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. ²For others will treat you as you treat them.* Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged. ³And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye* when you have a log in your own? ⁴How can you think of saying, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? ⁵Hypocrite! First get rid of the log from your own eye; then perhaps you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

⁶"Don't give what is holy to unholy people.* Don't give pearls to swine! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.

Effective Prayer

⁷"Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. ⁸For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks. ⁹You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? ¹⁰Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! ¹¹If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

The Golden Rule

¹²"Do for others what you would like them to do for you. This is a summary of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

The Narrow Gate

¹³"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell* is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose the easy way. ¹⁴But the gateway to life is small, and the road is narrow, and only a few ever find it.

The Tree and Its Fruit

¹⁵"Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are really wolves that will tear you apart. ¹⁶You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit. You don't pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles. ¹⁷A healthy tree produces good fruit, and an unhealthy tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree can't

7:2 Or For God will treat you as you treat others; Greek reads For with the judgment you judge you will be judged. 7:3 Greek your brother's eye; also in 7:5. 7:6 Greek Don't give the sacred to dogs. 7:13 Greek The way that leads to destruction.

How Should You View Material Wealth?

Read MATTHEW 6:19-34

This passage is part of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus deals with possibly the greatest distraction to following him wholeheartedly: wealth. This series of verses gives us at least three warnings about wealth and one prescription to overcome its enslaving effects:

1. We Must Watch How and What We Store.

Verse 19 says that we should not "store up treasures." The idea here is not simply saving, but stockpiling. Jesus is not condemning saving your resources or providing for your family (see 1 Timothy 5:8, p. 272). He is condemning the accumulation of possessions to flaunt or to impress others. We need to be able to enjoy what God has given us without making those possessions our primary ambition.

2. We Must Keep Our Vision Clear.

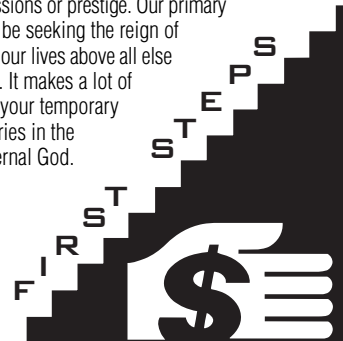
While we can enjoy what God gives us, we need to understand that the material things of this world are only temporary. Our personal possessions and investments can be devalued by inflation or deflation, destroyed by natural disasters, or stolen by thieves. That is the problem with making the accumulation of "things" your life's passion. It is so fleeting, temporary, unfulfilling, and even enslaving. When we don't have this perspective, we can become easily enslaved to consumption and accumulation. Then we are no longer serving God but money, and our vision is dark, shutting out the light of God's Word (verses 22-24).

3. We Should Not Worry about Material Things.

Worry is a powerful force that can divide or distract us. You can worry about your future, your job, your health, or even about what others think about you. But Jesus tells you to stop worrying, because God will *always* meet your needs (verses 25-30). Quite simply, worry is a waste of your valuable time as his servant on earth.

4. We Must Put God First in Our Lives

Our main concern should not be the acquiring of material possessions or prestige. Our primary pursuit should be seeking the reign of Jesus Christ in our lives above all else (verses 31-34). It makes a lot of sense to place your temporary needs and worries in the hands of an eternal God.



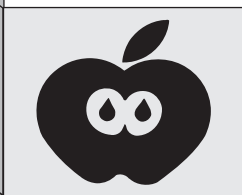
Our Walk Should Match Our Talk Read MATTHEW 7:21

In this verse, Jesus gets down to the heart of every person's belief. He states that calling him "Lord" is not enough to get into heaven. That is because anyone can say the word but not mean it. What counts is a person's changed life—a life of obedience to God's will.

Regarding the Christian life, it has been said, "It is not how high you can jump that matters, but how straight you can walk when you hit the ground again." You may be able to say all of the "right things," but if your faith does not impact the way you live, it is meaningless—even offensive. In truth, you do not have a real relationship with God.

An engraving on a cathedral wall in Germany bears these soul-searching words:

Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us,
 "You call me Master and obey me not;
 You call me light and see me not;
 You call me the Way and walk me not;
 You call me life and live me not;
 You call me wise and follow me not;
 You call me fair and love me not;
 You call me rich and ask me not;
 You call me eternal and seek me not;
 If I condemn you, blame me not."



The more we learn about what God has done for us, the more we will want to know what we can do for him. In addition, our motives will come from a pure heart, not from selfish ambition. God is looking for genuine believers whose walk matches their talk. Can you be counted as one?

CORNER STONES

produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. ¹⁹So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Yes, the way to identify a tree or a person is by the kind of fruit that is produced.

True Disciples

²¹"Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as 'Lord,' but they still won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven. ²²On judgment day many will tell me, 'Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' ²³But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Go away; the things you did were unauthorized.*'

Building on a Solid Foundation

²⁴"Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. ²⁵Though the rain comes in torrents

7:23 Or unlawful.

and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse, because it is built on rock. ²⁶But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. ²⁷When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will fall with a mighty crash."

²⁸After Jesus finished speaking, the crowds were amazed at his teaching. ²⁹for he taught as one who had real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law.

CHAPTER 8

Jesus Heals a Man with Leprosy

Large crowds followed Jesus as he came down the mountainside. ²Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached Jesus. He knelt before him, worshipping. "Lord," the man said, "if you want to, you can make me well again."

³Jesus touched him. "I want to," he said. "Be

healed!" And instantly the leprosy disappeared. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, "Go right over to the priest and let him examine you. Don't talk to anyone along the way. Take along the offering required in the law of Moses for those who have been healed of leprosy, so everyone will have proof of your healing."

Faith of the Roman Officer

⁵When Jesus arrived in Capernaum, a Roman officer came and pleaded with him, ⁶"Lord, my young servant lies in bed, paralyzed and racked with pain."

⁷Jesus said, "I will come and heal him."

⁸Then the officer said, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come into my home. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed! ⁹I know, because I am under the authority of my superior officers and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, 'Go,' and they go, or 'Come,' and they come. And if I say to my slaves, 'Do this or that,' they do it."

¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to the crowd, he said, "I tell you the truth, I haven't seen faith like this in all the land of Israel! ¹¹And I tell you this, that many Gentiles will come from all over the world and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. ¹²But many Israelites—those for whom the Kingdom was prepared—will be cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

¹³Then Jesus said to the Roman officer, "Go on home. What you have believed has happened." And the young servant was healed that same hour.

Jesus Heals Many People

¹⁴When Jesus arrived at Peter's house, Peter's mother-in-law was in bed with a high fever. ¹⁵But when Jesus touched her hand, the fever left her. Then she got up and prepared a meal for him.

¹⁶That evening many demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. All the spirits fled when he commanded them to leave; and he healed all the sick. ¹⁷This fulfilled the word of the Lord through Isaiah, who said, "He took our sicknesses and removed our diseases."*

The Cost of Following Jesus

¹⁸When Jesus noticed how large the crowd was growing, he instructed his disciples to cross to the other side of the lake.

¹⁹Then one of the teachers of religious law said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you no matter where you go!"

²⁰But Jesus said, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have no home of my own, not even a place to lay my head."

²¹Another of his disciples said, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father."

²²But Jesus told him, "Follow me now! Let those who are spiritually dead care for their own dead."*

Jesus Calms the Storm

²³Then Jesus got into the boat and started across the lake with his disciples. ²⁴Suddenly, a terrible storm came up, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵The disciples went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

²⁶And Jesus answered, "Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!" Then he stood up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly all was calm. ²⁷The disciples just sat there in awe. "Who is this?" they asked themselves. "Even the wind and waves obey him!"

Jesus Heals Two Demon-Possessed Men

²⁸When Jesus arrived on the other side of the lake in the land of the Gadarenes,* two men who were possessed by demons met him. They lived in a cemetery and were so dangerous that no one could go through that area. ²⁹They began screaming at him, "Why are you bothering us, Son of God? You have no right to torture us before God's appointed time!" ³⁰A large herd of pigs was feeding in the distance, ³¹so the demons begged, "If you cast us out, send us into that herd of pigs."

³²"All right, go!" Jesus commanded them. So the demons came out of the men and entered the pigs, and the whole herd plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned in the water. ³³The herdsmen fled to the nearby city, telling everyone what happened to the demon-possessed men. ³⁴The entire town came out to meet Jesus, but they begged him to go away and leave them alone.

CHAPTER 9

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

Jesus climbed into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town. ²Some people brought

8:17 Isa 53:4. 8:22 Greek *Let the dead bury their own dead.* 8:28 Some manuscripts read *Gerasenes*; other manuscripts read *Gergesenes*. See Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26.