


















17 Studies on The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chs 5 – 7)

“Showers are good for getting you through the week. They’re quick, efficient and do the basic job of getting you clean. However, for a deep cleansing it is hard to beat a good, long bath. A long soak gives you a clean that a shower just never can. . . . [W]e will be bathing in [three] chapters of the Bible, taking a good long soak in a part of Scripture so sharp, so winsome and yet so unsettling that we need to slow right down to let it do its work. But a warning - this isn’t a bath full of perfumed lotions and scented candles. Rather, it’s a bath with a good dose of antiseptic in it - parts of this are going to sting like crazy. But hang in there, that stinging feeling just means it’s doing you good.”

From the Bible Brief on Matthew 5-6 p 25 by Rory Shiner from The Briefing magazine # 355.

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Notes

In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: Nooma videos #2 Flame, #6 Kickball, #13 Rich and #16 Store presented by Rob Bell, the Tyndale Commentary Matthew by R.V.G. Tasker, the Bible Speaks Today Commentaries The Message of the Sermon on the Mount by John R. W. Stott and The Message of Matthew by Michael Green, Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 by Tom Wright, The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page, Lead with Wisdom by Mark Strom, the PTC booklet Epistle to the Romans by David Peterson, The Lion Handbook to the Bible, the Bible Brief on Matthew 5-6 by Rory Shiner from The Briefing magazine # 355, the Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study booklet The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne, the St Faith's Bible Study booklets Behold the Son of God Luke 3-8 by Stephen Gibson and The Light of the World Nine Studies in Matthew and Authentic Discipleship Nine Studies in Matthew 5:1-42 by Kerry Nagel the Lifeguide Bible Study booklet Sermon on the Mount by John Stott and www.anxietycentre.com. Throughout the studies I've quoted passages and used some of the questions from these books.

Study 1, Matt 5:1-12, The Beatitudes

Introduction

"In the context of the whole Bible, the Sermon on the Mount occurs at a time when the fortunes of Israel were at a low ebb. There had been a time when this was not so - under David and Solomon, Israel had been a safe and prosperous nation. According to his promises to Abraham, God had planted them in the Promised Land, subdued their enemies, and blessed them with prosperity. This was the historical high point of Israel as a nation.

From that point on, things went downhill. Israel was destroyed because of its chronic apostasy and rebellion against God. By the time of the Exile to Babylon in 587 BC, the everlasting kingdom promised to David in 2 Samuel 7 was in ruins (see Ps 89).

But all was not lost. God's promise to Abraham still stood. As Israel's fortunes declined, the prophets emphatically declared that God would restore his kingdom. . . .

The Jews of Jesus' day were sick of being losers. Nearly five centuries had passed since the last of the Old Testament prophets, and during that period, with a few exceptions, Israel had suffered nothing but humiliation at the hands of the Gentiles (first the Greeks and then the Romans). . . .

Into this mixed environment of messianic hope strode Jesus, proclaiming that the time had finally come - the kingdom of God was at hand. . . .

Having looked at the wider picture, the overall message of the Sermon comes into focus. Jesus has commenced his public ministry and called his disciples. He sits down with them and begins to teach them how they are to live as subjects in the long-awaited kingdom of God. He is giving them their first 'discipleship training' session."

From The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) pp 9-12 by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne.

Getting started

1. (a) In the past I've posed some questions about our identity. We studied Ephesians in 2012 where Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" which is about identity because we are a new creation "in Christ". I played the song "Father and Son" which is about Cat Stevens' personal journey to "find himself". The idea of "finding yourself" was popular in the 1970s. It is about finding your identity. When we did Galatians in 2015 I ran the Nooma video called "Name" which was about who we are - our identity.

Now I want to go to the next step and ask what did you find? Part of the search to find yourself is to find your direction or purpose in life. Another part of finding yourself is to work out who you are or what you are like.

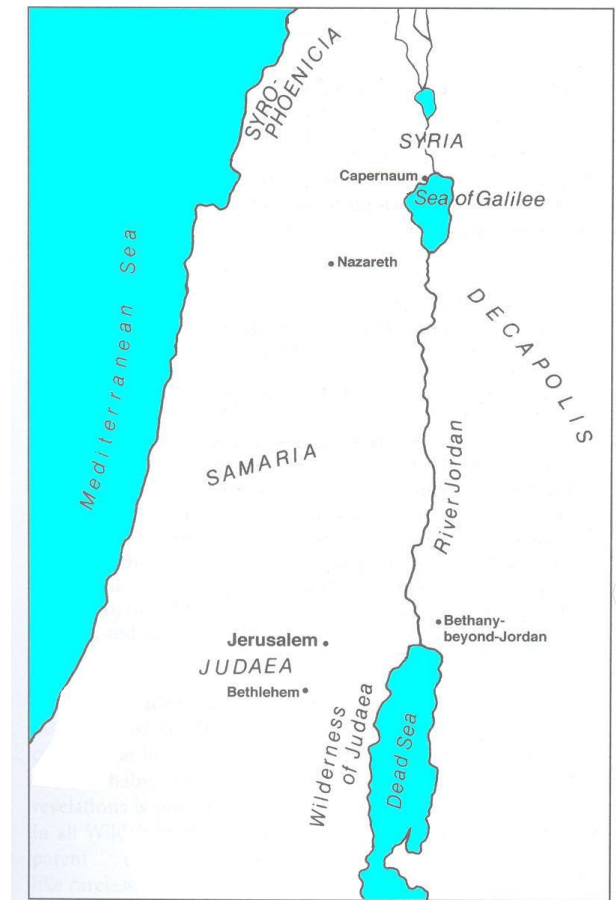
So the question this time is **what characteristics would you use to describe yourself?** (e.g. stubborn, reticent, determined, shy, creative, impulsive, emotional, conventional, pessimistic, optimistic, cynical, possessive, impatient, loving, caring, parochial, uninhibited, extrovert, organised, obsessive, contemplative, anxious, happy, careful.)



(b) If someone told you that he/she was a Christian what characteristics would you expect that person to have?

Bible

2. Read Matt 4:23-5:2 and Matt 7:28-29.
To whom did Jesus teach the Sermon on the Mount?



3. (a) Imagine you were amongst the crowds who came to see Jesus. You wouldn't have known much about him except that he was healing people in great numbers. Maybe you would have heard that he was Jewish and was teaching stuff about the kingdom of God. Jesus begins his "Sermon on the Mount" with these words:

Read Matt 5:1-12.

What do you think might have been your first impressions of these words?

Note: [T]he word 'Beatitude' is not in the Bible – it is just a title that some people have given to these verses. It comes from the Latin word *beatus*, meaning 'blessed'. It has nothing to do with your 'attitude'.

From The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) p 9 by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne.

- (b) What does the word "blessed" mean? What other word could be used?

"Each quality is commended, inasmuch as each person who exhibits it is pronounced 'blessed'. The Greek word *makarios* can and does mean 'happy'. So JBP [The New Testament in Modern English by J. B. Phillips] translates the opening words of each beatitude, 'How happy are . . . !' And several commentators have explained them as Jesus' prescription for human happiness. . . .

Nevertheless, it is seriously misleading to render *makarios* 'happy'. For happiness is a subjective state, whereas Jesus is making an objective judgment about these people. He is declaring not what they may feel like ('happy'), but what God thinks of them and what on that account they are: they are 'blessed'."

From The Message of the Sermon on the Mount p 33 by John R. W. Stott.

4. Who receives these blessings?

5. What is the “kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3, 10)?

6. Look up the following Old Testament references to get a better idea of the meaning of the phrases “poor in spirit”, “those who mourn”, “the meek” etc.?

(a) Look up Isaiah 61:1-7.

Context: In the first 39 chapters Isaiah deals mostly with God’s judgement and the Assyrian threat.

Babylon becomes the next aggressor and God’s people are taken into exile. A new phase in God’s dealing with his people begins to unfold in chapter 40 – a time of comfort and forgiveness. Chapters 41 and 42 - God is ruler of the nations. He will bring justice to the nations through his Servant. Chapters 43 to 55 – Isaiah explains how God fulfils his promises through his Servant. Chapters 56 to 59 – Although God will bring his people back from their punishment in exile, they will continue to sin. God will deal with their sins and redeem those who repent. The “good news” is described in Isaiah chapter 61 along with the blessings of the kingdom in Isaiah chapter 60.

What does “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3) mean?

(b) Look up Lam 1:1-4 and Jer 31:13.

Context: In Lamentations Jerusalem and the temple have been destroyed and many of God’s people have been taken in exile to Babylon.

Context: In Jeremiah ch 30 God promises to bring his people back from exile and restore them in their own land. With the return from exile (Jer ch 31) God promises a new shepherd, a new covenant and a new Jerusalem.

Why are they “mourning” (Matt 5:4)?

(c) Look up Ps 37:1-11.

Context: A psalm of wisdom.

What are “the meek” like (Matt 5:5)?

(d) Look up Isaiah 9:1-7, 51:1-6.

Context: Chapters 7 - 9 give specific details of God’s judgement through Assyria’s invasion of Israel (the northern kingdom) and Aram (also called Syria).

What is meant by “hungering and thirsting for righteousness” (Matt 5:6)?

(e) Look up Ps 103:8-10.
Context: A psalm of praise.

What does it mean to be “merciful” (Matt 5:7)?

(f) Look up Eze 36:22-33.
Context: God promises his people that their exile will end and they will return to their land.

How do we become “pure” (Matt 5:8)?

(g) Look up Isaiah 52:7, Ps 85:8-13.
Context: Psalm 85 is a psalm of thanksgiving.
Context: Isaiah – see 6 (a).

What is “peace” (Matt 5:9)?

(h) Look up Jer 20:1-10.

Context: Jeremiah preaches against the sin of the people, tells them to repent and warns of invasion as the judgement of God. They don’t like what Jeremiah says and in ch 20 he is beaten and put in the stocks.

What is it like to be “persecuted” (Matt 5:10)?

7. (a) How do we get the blessings of Matt 5:1-12?

(b) What is Jesus telling us to do in these verses?

The beatitudes set forth the balanced and variegated character of Christian people. These are not eight separate and distinct groups of disciples, some of whom are meek, while others are merciful and yet others are called upon to endure persecution. They are rather eight qualities of the same group who at one and the same time are meek and merciful, poor in spirit and pure in heart, mourning and hungry, peacemakers and persecuted.

Further, the group exhibiting these marks is not an elitist set, a small spiritual aristocracy remote from the common run of Christians. On the contrary, the beatitudes are Christ’s own specification of what every Christian ought to be. All these qualities are to characterize all his followers. . . .

What is this blessing? The second half of each beatitude elucidates it. They possess the kingdom of heaven and they inherit the earth. The mourners are comforted and the hungry are satisfied. They receive mercy, they see God, they are called the sons of God. Their heavenly reward is great. And all these blessings belong together. Just as the eight qualities describe every Christian (at least in the ideal), so the eight blessings

are given to every Christian. True, the particular blessing promised in each case is appropriate to the particular quality mentioned. At the same time it is surely not possible to inherit the kingdom of heaven without inheriting the earth, to be comforted without being satisfied or to see God without receiving his mercy and being called his children. The eight qualities together constitute the responsibilities, and the eight blessings the privileges, of being a citizen of God's kingdom. This is what the enjoyment of God's rule means.

From The Message of the Sermon on the Mount pp 31-34 by John R. W. Stott.

To finish

8. Compare these characteristics (i.e. the first half of each beatitude) described in the Beatitudes to the characteristics we used to describe ourselves in question 1.

(a) What are the similarities if any?

(b) Why are our characteristics so different to those in the Beatitudes?

(c) Which Beatitudes relate to our past and which relate to our present and future?

Study 2, Matt 5:13-16, Salt & Light

Getting started

1. Besides Jesus who has been an inspiration for you?

Before you answer this question I would like to have fun with this by playing some short sound bites. Your job is to say who the music reminds you of.

The theme tonight is salt and light. Once in a while someone stands out and does something heroic or inspirational. These people are like a light on a hill, a breath of fresh air, someone you can look up to and admire and be encouraged by. So in connection with the theme of light and salt, some of these people may have been a light for you.

I'll play the sound bite and your job is to say who the music reminds you of.

(a) Opening theme to the movie "Chariots of Fire" by Vangelis 1981 about 2 athletes in the 1924 Olympics in Paris, Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams.

(b) "My Way" written by Paul Anka and sung by Frank Sinatra 1969. Reminds me of John Gorton (PM 1968-1971).

(c) Theme to James Bond 007 movies (1st movie "Dr No" 1962).

(d) "It's Time" theme to Labor's election campaign, 1972, (lead singer Alison McCallum).

(e) Theme to the Superman movies (first one in 1978).

(f) "Candle in the Wind" song by Elton John and Bernie Taupin (1973 – Marilyn Monroe who died 1962, 1997 – Princess Diana).

(g) "Our Don Bradman" song by Art Leonard 1930. Don Bradman 1908-2001, test career 1928-1948.

(h) "Killing me Softly" sung by Roberta Flack 1973 about Don Mclean ("American Pie", "Vincent", "Empty Chairs").

(i) "Jumping Jack Flash" by The Rolling Stones 1968 – Mick Jagger.

These people may or may not have been an inspiration or a hero for you so back to the original question: Besides Jesus who has been an inspiration for you?



Why were they inspirational?

2. (Similar to KN 1(b)). You may or may not have been an inspiration for others but, to a lesser extent perhaps, what effect do you have on other people (e.g. you may effect people because they want your advice or just a chat, or you may effect people in such a way that they try to avoid you, or you may effect people by encouraging them or comforting them, or you may effect people in such a way that they find you boring, or funny or creative, or some people may love you or hate you)?

What effect do you have on other people (N.B. St Faith's vision statement is to be a community transformed by Jesus' love, fully devoted to loving one another, and radically committed to **impacting** the world with Christ's love.)?

Bible

3. Read Matt 5:13-16.

(a) Who is the “you” at the beginning of vv 13 & 14 (see Matt 4:23-5:2, 7:28-29)?

(b) (KN 2(a)) What two images does Jesus use to show that “you” will have a positive influence?

(c) What does it mean to be “salty”?

During his own boyhood Jesus must often have watched his mother use **salt** in the kitchen and light the lamps when the sun went down. Salt and light are indispensable household commodities. Several commentators quote Pliny’s dictum that nothing is more useful than ‘salt and sunshine’ (*sale et sole*). The need for light is obvious. Salt, on the other hand, had a variety of uses. It was both a condiment and a preservative. It seems to have been recognized from time immemorial as an essential component of human diet and as a seasoning or relish to food: ‘Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt?’ [Job 6:6]. In particular, however, in the centuries before refrigeration had been invented, it was used to keep meat wholesome and to prevent decay.

From The Message of the Sermon on the Mount p 58 by John R. W. Stott.

(d) What is the purpose of light?



(e) (i) (KN 2 (c)) Read Isaiah 42:6-7, 49:6, Matt 4:16.

Context: In the first 39 chapters Isaiah deals mostly with God’s judgement and the Assyrian threat. Babylon becomes the next aggressor and God’s people are taken into exile. A new phase in God’s dealing with his people begins to unfold in chapter 40 – a time of comfort and forgiveness. Chapters 41 and 42 - God is ruler of the nations. He will bring justice to the nations through his Servant. Chapters 43 to 55 – Isaiah explains how God fulfils his promises through his Servant.

Who is the “True Light” doing what Israel was supposed to do but didn’t?

(ii) Think about what Jesus did during his life (e.g. healing, teaching, prophecy, opposing, weeping, making friends, judging, saving, calming, exerting God’s authority).
How was Jesus a light?

(f) (KN 2 (e)) (i) From Matt 5:16 what are people supposed to see?

(ii) What result will follow?

(iii) Why?

(iv) What sort of good deeds inspire people (think back to question 1)?

The idea of doing **good deeds** in order that someone else should be praised was completely foreign in Greco-Roman society. Rank and status was what society was all about. You did things to maintain or increase your rank and status not so that someone else would get the glory.

"Talent, piety, virtue and citizenship could each offer a platform for new status. Divorce, marriage and adoption might offer a rare opportunity to lift one's rank. It was in everyone's interest to keep the system going. The costly business of benefactions brought status to those of means. . . .

Intellectuals, inscriptions, and pithy sayings only projected what everybody knew. This was the bottom line: know and maintain your rank. Compassion and humility will only hinder ambition."

From Lead with Wisdom by Mark Strom p 247.

(Play sound bite from John Dickson: HospitalJhealer4_2017.mp3 if needed.)

To finish

4. (a) Do Sydney's non-Christian society think of Christians as salt and light? Why/why not?

(b) What could a group of Christians do that would be salt and light in the community?

5. Can you do evangelism without talking about sin?

Most methods of evangelism (e.g. Romans Road to Salvation, 4 Spiritual Laws, 2 Ways to Live, Simply Christianity) talk about sin early and try to convince people that they are sinners and need saving from their sins. If you are unable to convince people that they are sinners then the method doesn't get past first base.

What if, instead of beginning with sin, you began with light/meaning.

You could begin the conversation with a question like

"Is there a light at the end of the tunnel?"

OR "what is the meaning of life?"

Think of a non-Christian reply to either of those questions and how would you proceed after that reply.

Study 3, Matt 5:17-20, Law

Getting started

1. (a) How would you feel if you began a project or started a new job and you were confronted with a whole set of rules and regulations?



- (b) Do St Faiths have any 'rules'? What are they? Are they necessary?

Bible

2. Read Matt 5:17-20.
(a) (KN 2(a)) From verse 17, what does it seem that some people were saying about Jesus' teaching? (Note "The Law" or "The Law and the Prophets" are ways of referring to the whole Old Testament.)

- (b) How did Jesus fulfil (i) the Law (v17) - see Deut 28:1-2, 15 and Heb 9:11-14?

(ii) the Prophets (v17) - describe how Jesus fulfilled these prophecies:
Gen 3:15, 2 Sam 7:12-16, Job 19:25-27, Isaiah 61:1-2, Dan 7:13-14, Mic 5:2-5a, Zech 9:9-11, Mal 3:1.

- (c) (KN 2 (b)) From verse 18 what does Jesus say about the importance of the Old Testament?

- (d) (KN 2 (c)) From verse 19, who will be "great" in God's Kingdom? Why, do you think?

- (e) Jesus tells us to have a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees (v 20). What is it about 'Pharisaic righteousness' that we have to exceed (see Matt 23:23-26)?

He does not intend to abolish **the Law and the Prophets** — he is going to supercharge them. We see this in what are called the antitheses: the 'you have heard this, but I say this' formula. You have heard it said, 'Don't commit murder, don't commit adultery, don't swear falsely, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, love your neighbour ...' But I say, 'Don't even be angry, don't even look with lust, don't swear at all, don't take revenge, love your enemies.' It is not that outward purity is wrong, but you have to go way beyond it. It has to be much more than skin deep. External purity is not what matters; the desires of the heart are just as important.

From The Wrong Messiah p 124 by Nick Page.

(f) (KN 2(f)) Read Ezekiel 36:24-27.

(i) What does God one day promise to do?

(ii) How will these enable God's people succeed where the Pharisees failed in righteousness?

3. What place does the Law have in a Christian's life considering what Jesus has said about the Law (Matt 5:19) and that Paul said we have been released/discharged from the law (Rom 7:6)?

Now that we have died with Christ, we are "discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive" [Rom 7:6]. In what sense can it be said that Christians have been "discharged from the law"? Fundamentally, Paul would seem to be focussing on **the law's condemnation of sinners** (cf. 3:19-20, 8:1). The penalty has been paid by Jesus Christ and we are free from the law's penalty. However, the context also focuses on the law's inability to change our natures and to enable us to bear fruit for God. Christians have been discharged from the dominion or **control of the law** so that they might "belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead" (v. 4). This does not mean that Old Testament law is irrelevant to Christian living, although its application will be dependent on our understanding of how Jesus and the Apostles made use of it. Rather, the emphasis of this passage is on the fact that our relationship to God is **through** Jesus and not based on devotion to the law. The Christian's new life of righteousness and holiness is not achieved by obedience to the law but in the way already set forth in Romans 6.

As in [Rom] 6:15-23, the new life is spoken of in terms of **service**: "so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit". This new life of the Spirit is Paul's subject in chapter eight and its nature is not detailed until then. However, the contrast in 7:6 (literally "not in oldness of letter, but in newness of spirit") suggests that **commitment to the letter of the law is a characteristic of the old age** (compare 2 Cor. 3:6). The new age involves bondage of a new kind **to the lordship of Christ in the power of his indwelling spirit**.

From the PTC booklet Epistle to the Romans pp 39-40 by David Peterson (his emphasis in bold).

To finish

4. Consider these 2 responses to the question "What's it like to be born again?"

(i) There are things you shouldn't do and you try not to do them but even if you do them you are still forgiven.

(ii) "It was like a hot knife going into me like I was butter and this knife was opening me up and suddenly I could see all this possibility in the world and, something more than that, there was hope and beauty where all I felt before was hollow."

From Tim Winton's film, The Turning.

(a) What is emphasised in each response?

(b) Which response is more correct? Why?

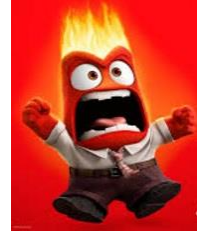
(c) Which response is more attractive? Why?

5. Is our righteousness about how obedient we are? Why/why not?

Study 4, Matt 5:21-26, Anger and Murder

Getting started

1. (a) How can you tell if someone is angry?



- (b) What is the difference between being annoyed and being angry?

- (c) How do you calm someone down when they are angry?

- (d) How do you calm yourself down when you are angry?

Bible

2. Read Matt 5:21-37.
What is your general impression about what Jesus says about the laws on murder, adultery, divorce and oaths?
3. (KN 2(a)-(d)). Read Matthew 5:21-22.
(a) Who are “the people long ago” that Jesus refers to here (see e.g. Exodus 20:13)?
- (b) What are they told not to do?
- (c) In verse 22, the “I” is emphatic. What authority is Jesus “assuming” here?
- (d) What does Jesus say his disciples must be careful not to do? Why?
4. Have you ever called anyone *Raca* (or the English equivalent) or worse?
(a) What is wrong with that?

(b) What should you do instead?

The scribes properly tried to safeguard citizens from gratuitous insult. To call someone *Raca*, an Aramaic swearword for 'blockhead' could lead to a hearing before the village council. No, says Jesus, that attitude of arrogantly dismissing one of God's creatures as an idiot will face the judgment of God.

From The Message of Matthew p 94 by Michael Green.

5. Jesus puts anger and murder in the same category.
(a) How are anger and murder similar?

(b) How are anger and murder different?

Video

The Nooma video, #16, Store, by Rob Bell, is one of 24 made between 2002 and 2009. In each video Rob Bell takes an aspect of Christian life and expresses it in an interesting and challenging way.

6. What are your first impressions of this video?



7. What is the main point of the video?
8. Most of Rob Bell's videos have a story going on in the background while Rob Bell is talking. In this video a man is pushing a shopping trolley around the supermarket. How does this background story relate to what Rob Bell is talking about?
9. What point is made about Jesus getting angry (Mark 3:1-6 if you want to look it up)?
10. According to this video what is bad about anger?
11. What advice does Rob Bell give about dealing with our anger?

Study 5, Matt 5:27-30, Lust and Adultery

Getting started

1. What does our society think about 'love' and 'lust'?



Bible

2. Read Matt 5:27-30.
According to Jesus, what is the full meaning of the 7th commandment, "Do not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14)?

3. (a) When is lust good?

- (b) When is lust bad?

- (c) Who is interested in art, like art gallery art?
Is nakedness ok if it is art? Why/why not?

- (d) How do you control your lust?

4. (a) How does Jesus shock his audience in this section?

- (b) Under what circumstances might you remove your right eye/hand?

- (c) What would this be 'better' than?

- (d) What is the point of this example of self-mutilation?

Sexual desire, though itself good and God-given, is like the fire of Gehenna, which needs firmly keeping in place. Saying 'no' to desire when it strikes inappropriately – in other words, outside the context of marriage - is part of the most basic Christian discipline.

This is not 'repression', as people sometimes suggest. It is more like the pruning of a rose, cutting off some healthy buds so that the plant may grow stronger and produce better flowers. Choosing not to be swept along by inappropriate sexual passion may well feel on occasion like cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye, and our world has frequently tried to tell us that doing this is very bad for us. But, for neither the first nor the last time, we must choose to obey our Lord rather than the world.

From Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 pp 48-49 by Tom Wright.

Video

The Nooma video, #2, Flame, by Rob Bell, is one of 24 made between 2002 and 2009. In each video Rob Bell takes an aspect of Christian life and expresses it in an interesting and challenging way.

5. What are your first impressions of this video?
6. What is the main point of the video?
7. What can "love" mean in today's common usage?
8. Three Hebrew words for "love" are "raya", "ahava" and "dod". What does each word mean?
9. What does Rob Bell say is the problem with having "dod" without having the other two?
10. What does Rob Bell say is so powerful about having the three flames together?



Rob Bell finishes with:

May you honour the way that God created you.

May you have a profound sense of respect for the fact that you are a deeply spiritual and mysterious being and that sex is ultimately a profoundly spiritual thing.

May you enjoy what God created to last a lifetime
and may you discover the big flame.

To finish

11. Are sexual sins worse than other sins? Why/why not?
12. Notice that Rob Bell never mentions sin. Why do you think he doesn't talk about sexual sins?

Study 6, Matt 5:31-32 and 19:1-9, Divorce

Getting started

1. What does our society think about divorce?



2. Is divorce a problem in our society? Why/why not?

Bible

3. (KN 2(a)). Read Malachi 2:13-16.

Context: Malachi was written after the exile so God's people are back in Israel. It is about 80 years after Haggai and Zechariah spurred the people on to rebuild the temple but disillusionment had set in, times were hard, the promised prosperity had not been realised and people doubted God and the prophets. This showed in an increasingly casual attitude to worship and God's standards.

From The Lion Handbook to the Bible p 459.

Part of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and wider Jewish society was over divorce.

(a) What were men doing?

(b) Why, do you think, they did this?

4. (KN 2 (b)) Read Matthew 19:1-9 and 5:31-32.

(a) What Old Testament "permission" did the Pharisees use to argue that their practice of changing wives when they felt like it was OK with God?

Rabbi Shammai taught that divorce was permitted only in extreme cases. Rabbi Hillel taught that it was permitted for any and every reason.

From the Lifeguide Bible Study booklet Sermon on the Mount p 25 by John Stott.

(b) What is Jesus' belief about divorce?

(c) Why does Jesus take that stand?

(d) What might divorce teach us about the hardness of our hearts?

Jesus' teaching on **divorce**, for example, has been seen as a blanket injunction for all times. It is wrong. Full stop. But divorce today is very different from Jesus' day. Jesus' teaching on divorce (Matt. 5:31-32) has to be seen first and foremost in the context of protecting the weak and the powerless. In first-century Judea a woman could be divorced for virtually any reason. Deuteronomy allowed for a man to divorce his wife if he found 'something objectionable about her' (Deut. 24:1) and by first-century AD this catch-all phrase meant that a man could issue a bill of divorce for virtually any reason. Different rabbinical schools argued that it permitted a man to divorce his wife if she burned the dinner (Rabbi Hillel), or even if she were less attractive than another woman (Rabbi Akiba). Women, on the other hand, could only initiate divorce if their husband was impure in some way. We can observe this in action. Josephus divorced his wife because he was 'not pleased with her behaviour', even though she was the mother of his three children. He subsequently went up in the world and married a Cretan Jew 'of eminent parents'. So Jesus' injunction — that divorce is only permissible in the case of adultery — not only protects women, but goes way beyond the restrictions of rabbinical Judaism.

From The Wrong Messiah p 125-126 by Nick Page.

5. Read 1 Cor 7:10-16, also known as the "Pauline Privilege".

Context: Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to answer a number of problems and issues that the church was struggling with i.e. divisions within their group, wisdom and foolishness, sexual immorality, lawsuits among believers, marriage and singleness, food sacrificed to idols, Paul's apostleship, idolatry, headship, eating meals together, spiritual gifts, the resurrection and collecting money.

Does Paul give another ground for divorce? Why/why not?

To finish

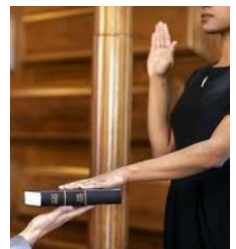
6. (KN 4(a)) Jesus has not, here, given a full discussion of marriage breakdown and how to respond. (We might think of situations of abuse, verbal and/or physical, domestic violence, desertion.) But how do you think Jesus' teaching applies today?

7. How can we help people who have been through a divorce?

Study 7, Matt 5:33-37, Oaths

Getting started

1. What is an oath?
2. What is swearing?
3. (KN 1b) When giving evidence in court, a person can be asked “Do you swear by Almighty God that the evidence you shall give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?”
Why are people asked to “swear” in this way, do you think?



Bible

4. (a) (KN 2a) Read Numbers 30:1-2 and Deuteronomy 6:13.

Context: Numbers 30:1-2

Towards the end of the 40 years wandering in the desert between Moses appoints Joshua as his successor. Then follows 3 more chapters of rules to live by.

Context: Deut 6:13

On the eve of entering the Promised Land Moses addresses his people, some of which is a re-statement of various laws.

What were the Old Testament principles here?

- (b) (KN 2b) Read Matthew 23:16-22.

Context: Matthew devotes ch 23 to Jesus' criticisms of the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

What have the people of Israel done with God's instructions?

5. Read Matthew 5:33-37.
(a) (KN 2c) What does Jesus say about “swearing oaths”?

(b) (KN 2d) Instead of swearing oaths, what are Jesus' disciples to do?

(c) (KN 2d) Why do you think Jesus says this?

(d)(KN 2e) What does Jesus' reference to "the Evil One" mean?

To finish

6. (a) (KN 3a) What principle is Jesus teaching here about all our words, our speech?

(b) (KN 3b) In what situations do you find this most difficult?

(c) (KN 3c) What would this mean for a Christian in politics?

7. (KN 4a) Some religious groups refuse to take oaths in court.
Do you think Jesus' words require this (see Matt 26:63-64)?
(In NSW, you can now make an affirmation instead of an oath).

Study 8, Matt 5:38-42, Loving your Enemies 1

Getting started

1. (KN 1a) Think of a time when someone mistreated or hurt you.
(a) How did you feel?



- (b) (i) What did you want to do to the person who had hurt you?

- (ii) Why?

Bible

3. (KN 2a) (a) **Verse 38** is quoted from Ex 21:24, Lev 24:20 or Deut 19:21.
What is the context for Deut 19:21 (read the whole chapter)?

- (b) Read Lev 19:18.

- (c) The Old Testament laws gave rules for what was to happen in the law court in Israel, and also for personal behaviour.

What do you think is the intention of these laws? (Some suggest it was to “limit” revenge?)

4. Read Matt 5:38-42.

[Verse] 39. *Evil (to ponero)* is much too general a translation, and the doctrine that evil should never be resisted is a wrong deduction from this verse. If the adjective is masculine, it should be rendered ‘the man who injures you’, and if neuter ‘injury’.

From the Tyndale Commentary Matthew p 70 by R.V.G. Tasker.

- (a) How are the disciples to respond to “the man who injures you”?

- (b) (KN 2b) How is Jesus’ instruction different to our natural response when “wronged” (v 39)?

(c) (KN 2c) (i) What happens in a relationship if revenge is taken (tit for tat)?

(ii) What might be accomplished in a relationship if verse 39 was followed?

Eye for eye and tooth for tooth . . . expressed the *lex talionis*, the principle of an exact retribution, whose purpose was both to lay the foundation of justice, specifying the punishment which a wrongdoer deserved, and to limit the compensation of his victim to an exact equivalent and no more. It thus had the double effect of defining justice and restraining revenge. It also prohibited the taking of the law into one's own hands by the ghastly vengeance of the family feud. . . .

It is almost certain that by the time of Jesus literal retaliation for damage had been replaced in Jewish legal practice by money penalties or 'damages'. . . .

But the scribes and Pharisees evidently extended this principle of just retribution from the law courts (where it belongs) to the realm of personal relationships (where it does not belong). They tried to use it to justify personal revenge, although the law explicitly forbade this: 'You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people.' [Lev 19:18] Thus, 'This excellent, if stem, principle of judicial retribution was being utilized as an excuse for the very thing it was instituted to abolish, namely personal revenge.' [John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Tyndale Press, 1972), p. 35.]

From *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* pp 104-105 by John R. W. Stott.

To be struck on the right cheek, in that world, almost certainly meant being hit with the back of the right hand. That's not just violence, but an insult: it implies that you're an inferior, perhaps a slave, a child, or (in that world, and sometimes even today) a woman. What's the answer? Hitting back only keeps the evil in circulation. Offering the other cheek implies: hit me again if you like, but now as an equal, not an inferior.

Or suppose you're in a lawcourt where a powerful enemy is suing you (perhaps for non-payment of some huge debt) and wants the shirt off your back. You can't win; but you can show him what he's really doing. Give him your cloak as well; and, in a world where most people only wore those two garments, shame him with your impoverished nakedness. This is what the rich, powerful and careless are doing. They are reducing the poor to a state of shame.

The third example clearly reflects the Roman military occupation. Roman soldiers had the right to force civilians to carry their equipment for one mile. But the law was quite strict; it forbade them to make someone go more than that. Turn the tables on them, advises Jesus. Don't fret and fume and plot revenge. Copy your generous God! Go a second mile, and astonish the soldier (and perhaps alarm him — what if his commanding officer found out?) with the news that there is a different way to be human, a way which doesn't plot revenge, which doesn't join the armed resistance movement (that's what verse 39 means), but which wins God's kind of victory over violence and injustice.

From *Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15* pp 51-52 by Tom Wright.

5. (KN 2 e, f) (a) What attitude to others "in need" is reflected in Matthew 5:40-42?

(b) In what situations would these instructions apply to you today?

Then there is that odd phrase, '**if anyone wants to sue you**' [Matt 5:40]. This is not about charity. This is not about someone simply in need of a coat who asks for a loan of yours. The Greek word translated 'coat' implies something nearer to what we would call a shirt, something worn next to the skin. It was the undergarment, while the cloak was worn on top. This, then, is a lawsuit where the creditor is demanding the shirt off your back, and then takes your jacket as well. Who, in Jesus' society, would do that? Those who were suing for the repayment of a debt. The image recalls a passage in Deuteronomy:

When you make your neighbour a loan of any kind, you shall not go into the house to take the pledge. You shall wait outside, while the person to whom you are making the loan brings the pledge out to you. If the person is poor, you shall not sleep in the garment given you as the pledge. You shall give the

pledge back by sunset, so that your neighbour may sleep in the cloak and bless you; and it will be to your credit before the LORD your God. (Deut. 24:10-13).

This picture shows a debt pledged by the only thing a poor person has to guarantee security: his garment. Deuteronomy says to give it back by sunset because, for many poor people, their outer garment served as their bedding as well. For the peasant followers of Jesus, encumbered by debt, owing taxes and tithes, this message would be shocking. Unfair even. In this context, a prayer like the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13) has to be read somewhat differently. 'Forgive us our debts,' it runs, 'as we also have forgiven our debtors.' The Greek word is *opheilema*, which refers to a monetary debt. To think of it as sins – or the archaic 'trespasses' – is not wrong, in the wider context of Jesus' teaching, but it misses the very real application for his first-century listeners who were owed money. The forgiveness from God was conditional on how they treated those who were in hock to them.

Then there is **the 'second mile'** [Matt 5:41]. Who forces you to go a mile? Soldiers. This is a specifically military issue; an imperial issue, indeed. 'Forces you to go' (*angareuo*) is a technical term for the Roman soldier's practice of commandeering civilian labour in an occupied country. The same word is used when Simon of Cyrene is compelled to carry Jesus' crossbeam (Matt. 27:32). Imperial soldiers could simply order a peasant to act as a porter and the peasant had to comply. Jesus suggests that his disciples should go beyond the *milium* – which is a Latin word for the Roman military mile of 1,000 paces. So this is an unmistakable imperial, military situation, a situation born out of occupation.

Then the final illustration: give to beggars and **do not refuse those who want to borrow from you** [Matt 5:42]. The beggars clause is self-explanatory, but why would someone in Jesus' time refuse to lend someone money? Probably because they thought they would not get it back. There were two reasons for that: either the loanee was too poor to repay, or the loan itself would become null and void. We are back on debts again, such a huge issue for Jesus' audience.

Torah law had specific clauses designed to protect people from falling into long-term debt. Every seventh year – the Sabbath year – debts were cancelled. No more money needed to be paid. The intention was good, but the effect was to make credit harder to gain, since no one was going to lend money near the Sabbath year. Rabbi Hillel found a way round it, by inventing a loan secured by a *prozbul*, a declaration that the loan would not be remitted in the seventh year. But that too backfired, because the effect was to bypass the Sabbath legislation entirely and so introduce permanent debt.

So one implication of Jesus' message here is that the creditor should not refuse to lend money because it is near a Sabbath year. Just loan it anyway. It is a strong message to creditors, which included not just the wealthy citizens, but the temple as well. The temple was the richest institution in Jewish Palestine. Its wealth was invested in the land through loans to needy peasants, and when the loans were defaulted on, the land passed into temple ownership.

We can see from this examination that the illustrations Jesus gives are specifically grounded in his time and society. He is talking to poor peasants being sued by their creditors, to oppressed citizens being struck by soldiers and forced to act as porters, to those at the bottom of the social scale, brutally dismissed with a back-of-the-hand slap. He is talking to people with real enemies. He is telling them to show astonishing, utterly subversive generosity in the face of aggression.

Ironically, it was this kind of radical submission, this unblinking repudiation of violence and revenge, which made Jesus the most dangerous, most potent threat to the authorities. It was precisely because he refused to fight in any conventional way that the authorities did not know how to combat his ideas.

From The Wrong Messiah p 128-129 by Nick Page.

To finish

6. (KN 3a) Look up Matt chs 18 and 23.
What other Christian principles (from Jesus) might limit the extent of our "turning the other cheek" (e.g. Jesus himself "stood up to" the Pharisees in Matthew 23 and he taught disciples to confront sin in another in Matthew 18:15ff)?

Study 9, Matt 5:43-48, Loving your Enemies 2

Getting started

1. What is love?



Bible

6. Read Matt 5:43-48
How is God's making the sun rise and sending rain, his way of loving his enemies?
7. Why should we not just love those who love us?

The Old Testament had been clear on this. 'Love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord' [Lev 19:18]. Because he is like that, we must be like that. And of course *neighbour* was to be taken in the broadest possible sense of 'other person', like the neighbour in the parable of the good Samaritan [Luke 10:30-37]. But that was too tough for many of the scribes. It was unrealistic to understand 'neighbour' so broadly. So they added yet another of their escape clauses: '*and hate your enemy*' [Matt 5:43]. That command appears nowhere in the Old Testament. It is a concession to human frailty invented by the scribes. . . . But Jesus will have none of it. It is not limited love, but unlimited love, love to the just and the unjust, to evil and good alike, that is the mark of the Great Lover. And it must not be sporadic, but a settled mark of our characters, just as the regular following of day by night is a mark of the settled character of God himself. That is the meaning of *perfect, teleioi* (48). Be like God in indiscriminating and undifferentiating love towards all and sundry. That is the mark of the Master. That is the mark of the disciple.

The word 'love' is significant. . . . For *agape* means a love that gives itself for the good of the recipient. It means love that springs from the nature of the donor rather than from the real or fancied worthiness of the recipient. Of course we cannot like our enemies. But we can love them, in this sense of *agape* love. We can desire and work for their highest good. We can regard them as those for whom Christ came and died and who are therefore intensely valuable to him. At least, we can begin to move in that direction if we ourselves have been magnetized by the love of the God who treats us like that.

From The Message of Matthew p 97-98 by Michael Green.

8. Think of someone who doesn't like you. How could you try to make a better relationship with that person?
9. (a) What bearing should these verses have on our attitude to war?

(b) Is it ok to defend ourselves?

In reading the teaching of Jesus we should always pay attention to what it meant for those first listeners. His teaching had — and has — an immediate social impact. Nothing illustrates that better than the one truly ground-breaking and original idea in the teaching: **non-violence**.

In church you do not hear a great deal about Jesus' advocacy of non-violence. On a personal level, I have been a Christian for over thirty years and I cannot recall hearing a single sermon on the topic. Pacifism is something which is restricted to the fringe. Monks, perhaps. Anabaptists and Quakers. Strange people with beards and sandals. We know he said these things, but we do not like to talk about it. Whisper it quietly, but maybe he was a bit misguided on this one.

From a purely historical point of view, Jesus' espousal of non-violent resistance is absolutely fundamental to his message and to the events of his life. Jesus, to put it bluntly, was killed because he refused to fight. We cannot understand the historical Jesus, and certainly not what happened to him, without grasping the principle of non-retaliation and non-violent resistance. Jesus' entire approach to changing society — changing the world — was based on the idea of non-violent resistance.

The root of his teaching lay in his ideas about who constituted our neighbour, and what our attitude to that neighbour should be. 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself,' he tells people (Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). But when asked to define who this neighbour is, he tells the story of the good Samaritan, completely overturning the conventional wisdom. Neighbours were not those in your street or those in your clan or your tribe or your nationality: your enemy was, in fact, your neighbour. Your neighbours were everywhere. And they should be loved. This was a truly, astonishingly radical idea. 'There is a sweeping universality in the love Jesus demands which has no parallel in Jewish literature. . . .

Jesus' teaching on non-violent resistance owes nothing to any previous teacher. It always has been dangerous, radical. Kurlansky has pointed out that non-violence is such a radical concept that there is no positive word for it. It can only be defined by what it is not.

It remains radical because the underlying issue is common to all times and all societies. 'Most political orders are established by violence and certainly use violence to maintain themselves.' That was certainly true in Jesus' day and it must have been very hard for Jesus' Jewish audience to grasp the idea that those who oppressed them — the enemies of Israel — should not be struck down.

From The Wrong Messiah p 126-129 by Nick Page.

To finish

9. Compare what Jesus has been teaching us about love in Matt 5:38-48 with your answer to question 1. What have you learnt?

Study 10, Matt 6:1-4, Giving

Not conforming to the world is a familiar New Testament concept. But it is not so well known that Jesus also called us not to conform to the *religious* establishment. He saw (and foresaw) the worldliness of the nominal church and commanded the Christian community to be truly distinct from it in our life and practice. In this passage Jesus shifts his focus from our moral righteousness to our 'religious' righteousness.

From the Lifeguide Bible Study booklet Sermon on the Mount p 31 by John Stott.



Getting started

1. Why do you think ministers and religious people are often portrayed negatively in movies and on TV?

Bible

2. Read Matt 6:1-18.
What do you think Jesus means in 6:1 when he tells his disciples to "be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men"?

3. How do you feel during a sermon on giving?



4. Read Matt 6:1-4 again.
(a) What is the right way to give to the needy?

(b) What is the wrong way to give to the needy?

(c) What reward do the hypocrites get?

(d) In certain situations do you ever desire the same reward? In which situations?

(e) (K 2e) What do you think Jesus means (v3) when he says “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”?

(f) (K 2g) In verse 1 and verse 4 Jesus speaks of “reward from your Father in heaven”. What do you think Jesus means here?

Video

The Nooma video, #13, Rich, by Rob Bell is one of 24 made between 2002 and 2009. In each video Rob Bell takes an aspect of Christian life and expresses it in an interesting and challenging way.

5. What are your first impressions of this video?



6. Most of Rob Bell's videos have a back story going on while he's talking. In this video he is waiting for his car to be fixed. What has this got to do with the rest of the video?

7. Rob Bell comments on the bumper sticker “God bless America” by saying that God has already blessed America. American politicians always seem to be saying “God bless America” but Australian politicians never say “God bless Australia”. (a) Why not?

(b) Should God bless Australia? Why/why not?

(c) How can we bless Australia?

8. Rob Bell talks about the riches of the West and says some people say “I work for what I have. I deserve it. It's mine.” Is there another way to look at this?

9. Near the end of the video Rob Bell says that if you are like him you are looking for the “pitch”. This is where people expect to be told who to give money to. But Rob Bell says this is much bigger than that. What is Rob Bell’s pitch?
10. Rob Bell finishes with
 “So may you come to see that you are rich
 and that your possessions are luxuries that most of the people in the world don’t have.
 May you do what Jesus says.
 May you step in to your divine responsibility to give
 and when you do may you take hold of the life that is truly life.”
- How is this “life that is truly life” related to giving?

To finish

11. The passage was about giving to the needy but the emphasis in church is about giving to the church and then certain persons in the church decide where your money goes. This is the easiest way to give and the quickest way to ease your guilt (see question 3).
- (a) In which other areas can you give to the needy?
- (b) Do they have to be Christian organisations? Why/why not?
12. (a) (K 4a) Some people say that we should give to others in need and we should do good because it is “right” not in order to get rewards. What do you think?
- (b) (K 4b(iii)) Read Matt 10:37-42.
 What does Jesus mean by rewards in this passage?

What, then, is the ‘reward’ which the heavenly Father gives the secret giver? It is neither public nor necessarily future. It is probably the only reward which genuine love wants when making a gift to the needy, namely to see the need relieved. When through his gifts the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the sick healed, the oppressed freed and the lost saved, the love which prompted the gift is satisfied. Such love (which is God’s own love expressed through man) brings with it its own secret joys, and desires no other reward.

To sum up, our Christian giving is to be neither before men (waiting for the clapping to begin), nor even before ourselves (our left hand applauding our right hand’s generosity) but ‘before God’, who sees our secret heart and rewards us with the discovery that, as Jesus said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ [Acts 20:35].

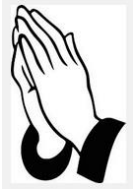
From The Message of the Sermon on the Mount p 132 by John R. W. Stott.

Study 11, Matt 6:5-18, Prayer and fasting

Getting started

1. (a) How often do you pray other than when you are at church or Bible Study?

(b) What do you pray for?



Bible

2. Read Matt 6:5-15.
(a) Why do the hypocrites (v5) pray?

(b) Why do the pagans (v7) pray?

(c) Why do you pray?

3. Concerning the Lord's Prayer (vv 9-13) . . .
(a) What should we pray about concerning the Father?

(b) What sort of kingdom do we want to come?

(c) Hasn't Jesus already brought in the kingdom (see Luke 17:21)?

(d) What else should we ask for besides bread?

(e) Is forgiveness conditional on us forgiving others?

(f) Are Christians supposed to ask for forgiveness every time they pray?
 Didn't Jesus forgive us for *all* our sins when he died on the cross?

Verses 14 and 15 “certainly does not mean that our forgiveness of others earns us the right to be forgiven. It is rather that God forgives only the penitent and that one of the chief evidences of true penitence is a forgiving spirit. Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offence against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling.”

From The Message of the Sermon on the Mount pp 149-150 by John R. W. Stott.

(g) Verse 13 suggests God could lead us into temptation if he wanted to, so we should pray that he doesn't. Do you think God would lead us into temptation? Why/why not?

(h) Does the Lord's Prayer imply anything about our relationship with God?

4. Read Matt 6:16-18.
 (a) Do you ever fast? Why/why not?

Fasting

“Jesus assumes that his followers are going to fast from time to time, as part of their prayer and devotion to God. Later on (9:14-15) he explains that this won't be the right thing to do while he is there with them, but hints that it will be once he's gone. But the question is, how?

The current practice of Jesus' day seems to have been to advertise one's fasting by letting your hair (and beard) go tangled, and by smearing ashes on your face. That's just play-acting, Jesus declares. It's putting on a mask. Real fasting is between you and God, not something you do to show off. So do what you normally do to your head and face - wash, comb, sort yourself out in the usual way (in his culture that included anointing with oil, and that's what this passage literally means). The important point, here and all through, is the question: is your eye fixed on God, or on someone (or something) else? What is your priority?”

From Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 p 62 by Tom Wright.

(b) Does fasting make your prayers more effective? Why/why not?

To finish

5. Examine your own 'religious' righteousness (see Matt 6:1).
 (a) Do you recite or sing words by rote and without thinking about their meaning?

 (b) Do you like doing things to make yourself 'big' rather than to make Jesus 'big'?

 (c) Do you put on the 'good Christian' facade for church but leave it off at home and at work?

 (d) How can we help each other be genuine about our faith *all* the time?

Study 12, Matt 6:19-24, Money

Getting started

1. (a) What do you want? In order of priority, list the 5 things that you want most.



- (b) Why do you want these things?

Bible

2. Read Matt 6:19-21.
What reasons does Jesus give for not storing up treasures on earth?

3. Keeping in mind that Jesus' death and resurrection doesn't happen until Matthew chs 27 & 28 and so Jesus hasn't saved anyone yet, what does Jesus mean by "treasures in heaven" (v20 and see also Matt 5:12, 5:46, 6:4, 6:6, 10:37-42)?

4. (K 2c) Verse 21 says "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" but we often hear it expressed in reverse e.g. "It doesn't matter what treasures you have, as long as your heart is in the right place". In verses 22 and 23, Jesus uses a metaphor that seems to have been commonly used at the time. A "bad eye" referred to someone who is selfish and 'stingy' with money. How is this "eye" image linked with the "heart" image?

5. (K 2d) What are the consequences if (a) "your eyes are good" (v22)?

(b) "your eyes are bad" (v23)?

The eye is the lamp of the body. This is not literal, of course, as if the eye were a kind of window letting light into the body, but it is a readily intelligible figure of speech. Almost everything the body does depends on our ability to see. We need to see in order to run, jump, drive a car, cross a road, cook, embroider, paint. The eye, as it were, 'illuminates' what the body does through its hands and feet. . . .

Not infrequently in Scripture the 'eye' is equivalent to the 'heart'. That is, to 'set the heart' and to 'fix the eye' on something are synonyms. . . . Jesus passes from the importance of having our heart in the right place (21) to the importance of having our eye sound and healthy.

The argument seems to go like this: just as our eye affects our whole body, so our ambition (where we fix our eyes and heart) affects our whole life. Just as a seeing eye gives light to the body, so a noble and singleminded ambition to serve God and man adds meaning to life and throws light on everything we do. Again, just as blindness leads to darkness, so an ignoble and selfish ambition (e.g. to lay up treasure for ourselves on earth) plunges us into moral darkness. It makes us intolerant, inhuman, ruthless and deprives life of all ultimate significance.

From The Message of the Sermon on the Mount p 157 by John R. W. Stott.

6. (a) (K 2e) In verse 24, Jesus contrasts two 'masters'. What are they?

(b) (K 2f) Why is it not possible to serve both, do you think? Explain, in practical terms?

"There are few areas where the standards of the world have so invaded the church as in this area of money. Christian giving is frequently at an abysmal standard, and when it rises to 10% or so, there is often the implicit or explicit assumption that God will bless you in financial terms for what you give. It is very convenient to forget that the preacher of this Sermon was penniless and remained that way until devotion to God drove him to a cross of wood. He practised what he preached. He did not try to serve God and Money. William Barclay makes an interesting point. 'Mammon' has a Hebrew root which means 'entrust'. Mammon was the wealth people entrusted to bankers to keep safe for them. But as the years went on, Mammon came to mean not that which is entrusted but that in which people put their trust. God entrusted us with all we have. It is the supreme treason to prize the gift above the donor. This generation is accountable at this point. Things that have been entrusted to us by God to support us have become, in effect, our god. Disciples are marked out clearly by their attitude to money.

From The Message of Matthew p 103 by Michael Green.

To finish

7. (a) Look at your answer to question 1.
Has the teaching of Matt 6:19-24 changed what you want? Why/why not?

8. (K 3d) Does Jesus' instruction in Matt 6:19-24 mean that we should not have money in the bank, investments, insurance policies, savings etc.? Why/why not?



Study 13, Matt 6:25-34, Worry

Getting started



1. Are you a worrier?
 - Yes. I worry quite a bit and about many things.
 - Yes. There are some things that I worry about regularly.
 - Yes. I do worry. But not overly.
 - Yes. I worry about a few things, but not that often.
 - No. I wouldn't consider myself a worrier.
2. Are you concerned about losing control?
 - Not really. I don't need to be in control.
 - Not really. I'm okay with not being in control all the time.
 - Yes. Sometimes it bothers me when I'm not in control.
 - Yes. I like to be in control.
 - Yes. I HAVE to be in control.
3. Do you ever have thoughts that run on and on and you can't seem to stop them?
 - No.
 - Yes. That happens to me sometimes.
 - Yes. That happens on and off.
 - Yes. Sometimes it gets quite annoying.
 - Yes. I feel like this a lot of the time.
4. How have you been feeling emotionally lately?
 - I feel very satisfied and content.
 - I feel good. No major problems.
 - I feel okay.
 - I'm having some issues right now.
 - I'm having some major issues.
5. Describe your sleep patterns over the last four weeks.
 - I've been sleeping very well (6 - 8 hours per night of sound sleep).
 - Not too bad (5 - 7 hours per night, some interruptions).
 - Average (4 - 6 hours per night, regular disruptions).
 - Not too good (3 - 5 hours per night with restlessness).
 - Not good (2 - 4 hours per night with a lot of restlessness).
6. How often do you feel overwhelmed?
 - Rarely (once or twice a year).
 - Occasionally (once or twice in six months).
 - Frequently (once or twice a month).
 - Regularly (once or twice a week).
 - Almost always (almost everyday, sometimes I don't).
7. Describe your rest/relaxation habits.
 - I take regular relaxation and rest breaks, including holidays.
 - I take frequent rest breaks and holidays.
 - I take some time to rest and the occasional holiday.
 - I don't take enough rest breaks and seldom holidays.
 - I don't stop often at all. Who has time for holidays.
8. Describe your daily lifestyle.
 - I have a nice balance of work, play, and rest.
 - I have a balance, but could take more time to rest and play.
 - I'm about average.
 - I frequently feel out of balance. Too much work and too many responsibilities.
 - I'm busy all day and everyday. Way too much to do.

9. Select the answer that best describes the events in your life this past year.
- It's been a very calm and satisfying year.
 - It's been good for the most part, however, there have been some pressures or changes.
 - It's been about average.
 - It's been kind of hectic and chaotic. Many changes and challenges.
 - It's been very unsettled. Lots of challenges and pressures.
10. How do you feel about yourself.
- I'm very confident and comfortable with who I am.
 - I feel pretty good about myself.
 - I'm okay.
 - I don't feel that good about myself lately.
 - I don't feel very good about myself at all.
11. In the last two months, have you experienced dizziness, upset stomach, trembling or shaking, or an unusual amount of fear or stress when trying to rest?
- No. Not at all.
 - A couple of times, but not too bad.
 - Occasionally.
 - Frequently, and it's getting more and more.
 - Almost always.
12. Do you avoid social situations or gatherings because of nervousness or anxiety?
- Yes. All the time.
 - Yes. Frequently.
 - Yes. Sometimes.
 - Yes. Very seldomly.
 - No. I like social situations.
13. Are you afraid that you may get into a place or situation where you may not be able to escape in a hurry?
- No. I don't think about that at all.
 - Occasionally. But not that often.
 - Yes. It does bother me sometimes.
 - Yes. I do think about it and do become nervous.
 - Yes. It is a big fear for me.
14. How often do you feel afraid or worried?
- I can't recall the last time I was really afraid or worried.
 - Not too often, but sometimes.
 - Frequently.
 - Regularly. Things have been very challenging lately.
 - Almost all the time. Things have been very difficult.
15. Are you concerned about what people think of you?
- Yes, absolutely!
 - Yes, often.
 - Yes, sometimes.
 - Yes, but only once and a while.
 - Not at all.
16. Do you have a lot of nervous energy (always on the go, hard to sit down, too much to do)?
- Yes. I can go all day and then some. No time to rest.
 - Yes, I do. But I do rest occasionally.
 - I think I'm about average.
 - I have some. But I do rest regularly.
 - I'm pretty relaxed most of the time.
17. How do you feel about confrontation (arguing or having disagreements)?
- I hate it. When there's a problem, I avoid it at all costs.
 - I don't like it. I try to avoid it if I can.
 - I don't like it, but I don't run away from it.
 - It's all part of interacting with people.
 - It doesn't bother me at all.

18. Do you search the Internet, books, or the library in search of answers regarding your anxiety and/or how you are presently feeling?

No. Not at all. If I do it's just for entertainment.

Yes. But not that often.

Yes. Sometimes.

Yes. I look online for answers about how I'm feeling.

Yes. I'm constantly looking for answers about how I'm feeling.

19. Have you talked with a doctor about your anxiety or anxiety symptoms?

No.

Yes, but only once.

Yes, a couple of times.

Yes, a few times.

Yes, many, many times.

20. When facing uncertainty and/or danger, do you worry about it until the situation and/or danger has been resolved?

No, I don't worry about it at all.

Yes, I worry about it once and a while.

Yes, I worry about it from time to time.

Yes, I worry about it often.

Yes, I can't stop worrying about it.

Mark your answers on a scale of 0 (for the least anxious answer) to 4 (for the most anxious answer).

Add up your scores for all 20 questions.

From www.anxietycentre.com

Bible

21. Read Matt 6:25-34.

(a) What is the difference between concern, worry and anxiety?

(b) Which of the three above is Jesus talking about in this passage?

22. The first word in v 25 is "therefore". This suggests that there was an idea somewhere earlier then comes the "therefore" in v 25 then comes the application in vv 25-34.

(a) What was the idea that came before the "therefore" in v 25?

(b) What is the application in vv 25-34?

23. How does Jesus use "the birds of the air" (v26) and "the lilies of the field" (v28) in his argument against worrying?

24. (a) What are the consequences if you go to the extreme of not caring at all about what you eat or drink or what you wear?

(b) Without going to these extremes what does Jesus mean in this passage?

(c) Does worry reveal a lack of faith (v 30)?

25. (a) What does it mean to “seek his [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness” (v 33 and see also 5:6, 10, 20 and 6:1)?

(b) Does this mean that if you “seek his kingdom and his righteousness” you don’t have to worry about food, water or clothes? Give reasons for your answer.

To finish

26. Play 2 verses of “Don’t Worry Be Happy” by Bobby McFerrin.

Here's a little song I wrote
 You might want to sing it note for note
 Don't worry, be happy
 In every life we have some trouble
 When you worry you make it double
 Don't worry, be happy

Ain't got no cash, ain't got no style
 Ain't got no gal to make you smile
 But don't worry, be happy
 When you worry your face will frown
 And that will bring everybody down
 So don't worry, be happy
 Don't worry, be happy now

Is this consistent with what Jesus is saying in Matt 6:25-34? Why/why not?

Study 14, Matt 7:1-6, Judging

Getting started

1. What personal characteristics do you find very irritating?



Bible

2. Read Matt 7:1-6.
 (a) Take the example of laziness as the “speck” (vv 3-5) you’ve seen in another person’s eye. How do you tell if you’ve got the corresponding “plank” in your own eye?

 (b) What problems would you have when confronting someone with their sin?
3. Do you think the irritating characteristics you noted in question 1 might be examples of the “specks” Jesus was talking about? Why/why not?

[Jesus] doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t have high standards of behaviour for ourselves and our world, but that the temptation to look down on each other for moral failures is itself a temptation to play God. . . .

[Jesus] is warning that the very people who seem most eager to tell others what to do (or more likely what not to do) are the people who should take a long look in the mirror before they begin. (Wright p 70.)

From Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 p 70 by Tom Wright.

4. (a) How would you feel if an “obviously” gay couple came to church?

 (b) Would you treat them the same as you would treat a straight couple? Why/why not?

 (c) How would you feel about their sins?

 (d) Is this an example of a speck in their eyes? Why/why not?

5. To follow Jesus' instructions in verse 6 you have to make a *judgement* to determine who it is that you are not to give your "pearls" to. What sort of judging does Jesus tell us *not* to do in verse 1?
6. What are the "pearls" that Jesus refers to in verse 6?
7. How would you know when to stop giving your "pearls"?
8. Do you think that *how* you give your pearls might be important? If so, how so? If not, why not?

'Dogs' was . . . a regular abusive term for Gentiles; pigs were kept only by Gentiles, since Jews didn't eat pork. From Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 p 70 by Tom Wright.

Jesus goes on to warn his disciples against wasting time on the hardened (6). Some people hear the message of God's kingdom and do not want to know. It is an irresponsible use of time and effort to continue to hammer on a door that is firmly closed. The disciples should push on a door and, if it is ajar, enter in. If it is firmly bolted, that is the indication to move on elsewhere. 'Do not throw your pearls to pigs,' he says. They would rather have truffles or acorns! Disciples of Jesus are not to be storm-troopers for the kingdom of God. They should be equipped with the most sensitive radar to see where the Spirit of God is already preparing the way, and only then move in.

From The Message of Matthew p 106 by Michael Green.

To finish

9. What can we do to be less irritating (see question 1)?

10. If you saw the following "specks" would you . . .

speck	talk to him/her?	not say anything?	get someone else to talk to him/her?
always late for church			
talking during sermon			
not dressed properly for church			
never takes communion			
never contributes money to the church			
eats too much at church or Bible study			
swears too much			
drinks too much			
talks too much			
smokes			
flirting			

Study 15, Matt 7:7-12, Seeking God

Getting started

1. (a) Name 2 things you have sought after in life (e.g. education, job, faith, wife/husband, beauty, wisdom, close friends, good church)?



(b) Which things did you seek - and find?

- and not find?

Bible

2. Read Matt 7:7-12

(a) What is there to be found (vv 7-8)?

(b) (K 2a) What is the encouragement to pray (vv 7-8)?

(c) (K 2b) What comparison does Jesus draw between us and our heavenly Father (vv 9-11)?

(d) (K 2c) How does this comparison give us confidence when we pray?

(e) (K 2d) What sort of “good gifts” do you think Jesus has in mind (v 11)?

(f) Is Jesus saying that whatever you ask for in prayer, you will get? Why/why not?

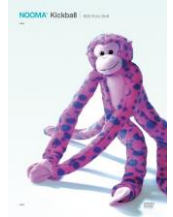
[I]t would be a shame to tone down one of the most sparkling and generous sets of premises anywhere in the Bible. Maybe it isn't 'selfish' to ask for things. Maybe it's just the natural thing that children are supposed to do with parents. Maybe our refusal to do so actually makes God sad or puzzled: why aren't his children telling him how it is for them, what they'd like him to do for them?

From Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 p 72 by Tom Wright.

Video

The Nooma video, #6, Kickball, by Rob Bell is one of 24 made between 2002 and 2009. In each video Rob Bell takes an aspect of Christian life and expresses it in an interesting and challenging way.

3. What are your first impressions of this video?



4. What are the similarities between, on one hand, Rob Bell *not* giving his son the ball and, on the other hand, God and us?
5. If we don't get what we ask for in prayer what might we be tempted to think about God?
6. What does Rob Bell suggest for the reason God doesn't give us what we ask for in prayer?
7. If we don't get what we ask for in prayer what might we be tempted to think might be wrong with us?

Rob Bell finishes with "May you believe God is good and across the street he has something better".

8. Read Matt 7:12 again.
 (a) (K 4a) How does this instruction sum up the Old Testament?
- (b) What specific things would you like people to do for you?
- (c) What can you do for *them*?

To finish

9. (a) (K 3a) How can we help each other to take Jesus' promises in these verses seriously?
- (b) (K 3b) Have you ever asked God for something, yet not received it?
 If so, why do you think God did not give you what you asked?

Study 16, Matt 7:13-23, Gates and false teachers

Getting started

1. If you wanted to give advice to a young Christian what would you warn him about?



Bible

2. Read Matt 7:13-14.
(a) (K 2b) Why is the gate that leads to life so small?

(b) Why do many people dislike the idea that there is only one gate that leads to life?

3. Read Matt 7:7-12.
What is the connection between asking and seeking (vv 7-12) and the narrow gate (vv 13-14)?

That image (7:13-14) poses the question, 'Have you gone through the gate? Are you on the road?' You cannot get on to the road until you have gone through the turnstiles. And they are not roomy. No room for baggage, for pride, for irresolution. Enter! Notice how here, as so often in the teaching of Jesus, we are challenged to decide. There is no comfortable middle ground embracing most of us, and leaving on either side the very good and the very bad. How comfortable it would have been were that the case! But Christianity is not about being very good, or very bad, or very comfortable. It is about being in God's kingdom or staying out. It is about allegiance to God, or rebellion. It is about being on the road that starts narrow but opens out into the life of heaven, or staying on the broad road of our self-centredness until it contracts to a dead halt in final destruction. An awesome choice. And we find that at the end of the Sermon we are not permitted merely to admire the teaching; we are challenged to bow to the preacher. Have you entered in? Are you on the road?

From The Message of Matthew p 108-109 by Michael Green.

2. Read Matt 7:15-23.
(a) (K 2d) Following vv 13 and 14, why might "false prophets" or "false teachers" be dangerous (see also Titus 1:10-11)?

(b) (K 2e) How can you tell if someone's teaching is true or false (see also Matt 5:20 & Titus 1:15-16)?

3. Read Matt 7:21-23 again.
(a) If it is only those who do the will of the Father that enter the kingdom of God then doesn't this mean you have to work to get to heaven? Why/why not?

(b) What is the “will of the Father”?

(c) What does doing things “in Jesus’ name” mean?

(d) What mistake have these prophets in v 22 made?

4. How can you tell the difference between genuine and fake Christians?

To finish

5. Wouldn’t it be fairer if the gate was wide enough for everyone? Why/why not?

6. (K 3b) How can we help each other not to be deceived by false teachers?

7. (a) Why would Jesus say he knew you?

(b) In what sense do you know Jesus?

1. If you wanted to give advice to a young Christian what would you say are the 5 most important things to remember about the Christian faith?



2. Read Matt 7:24-29.
(a) How did the storms reveal what was previously unseen?

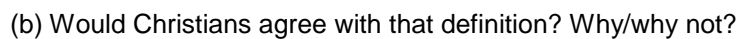
(b) What are the foundations of the Christian faith?

(c) What has this got to do with us?

(d) What kind of “storm” might test Jesus’ followers?

(e) Jesus repeats the phrase “these words of mine” (vv 24 & 26). What words in the Sermon on the Mount have been most memorable to you?

3. (a) How do you think non-Christians would define the Christian religion?



4. Wikipedia's definition of religion: Religion is a cultural system of behaviours and practices, mythologies, world views, sacred texts, holy places, ethics, and societal organisation that relate humanity to what an anthropologist has called "an order of existence".
- (a) What would "religionless" Christianity look like?

(b) Is the Sermon on the Mount an example of religionless Christianity? Why/why not?

5. With Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we believe that Jesus Christ came to destroy religion. Religion, if conceived as a human attempt to become acceptable to God by whatever system of beliefs and practice, is a beggar's refuge. It will not keep out the wind and the hail. What Jesus offers is totally different. It begins not from our reaching up, but from God's reaching down. It is not a religion at all, but a revelation and a rescue. Jesus is the revelation of what God is like; never has there been such a true likeness. The King has come to bring in the kingdom. He is no less than God's rescue for men and women lost in self-centredness and sin.

From The Message of Matthew p 110 by Michael Green.

Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons.

To finish

6. If a non-Christian asked you what the Sermon on the Mount was about, what would you say?