

JEN WILKIN

SERMON ON THE MOUNT



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CONTENTS

	<i>About The Gospel Coalition</i>	4
	<i>Foreword</i>	5
	<i>How to Use This Study</i>	10
	<i>A Message for Group Leaders</i>	11
WEEK 1	THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN	12
	<i>MATTHEW 5:1-2</i>	
WEEK 2	WHO IS BLESSED?	14
	<i>MATTHEW 5:3-12</i>	
WEEK 3	A PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE	30
	<i>MATTHEW 5:13-20</i>	
WEEK 4	“YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID ...” PART 1	46
	<i>MATTHEW 5:21-30</i>	
WEEK 5	“YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID ...” PART 2	60
	<i>MATTHEW 5:31-48</i>	
WEEK 6	SECRET RIGHTEOUSNESS	74
	<i>MATTHEW 6:1-18</i>	
WEEK 7	WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS	90
	<i>MATTHEW 6:19-34</i>	
WEEK 8	DO UNTO OTHERS	106
	<i>MATTHEW 7:1-12</i>	
WEEK 9	A FOUNDATION THAT ENDURES	122
	<i>MATTHEW 7:13-29</i>	
	<i>APPENDIX: Matthew 5–7</i>	138

ABOUT THE GOSPEL COALITION

The Gospel Coalition is a fellowship of evangelical churches deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. We have become deeply concerned about some movements within traditional evangelicalism that seem to be diminishing the church's life and leading us away from our historic beliefs and practices. On the one hand, we are troubled by the idolatry of personal consumerism and the politicization of faith; on the other hand, we are distressed by the unchallenged acceptance of theological and moral relativism. These movements have led to the easy abandonment of both biblical truth and the transformed living mandated by our historic faith. We not only hear of these influences, we see their effects. We have committed ourselves to invigorating churches with new hope and compelling joy based on the promises received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We believe that in many evangelical churches a deep and broad consensus exists regarding the truths of the gospel. Yet we often see the celebration of our union with Christ replaced by the age-old attractions of power and affluence, or by monastic retreats into ritual, liturgy, and sacrament. What replaces the gospel will never promote a mission-hearted faith anchored in enduring truth working itself out in unashamed discipleship eager to stand the tests of kingdom-calling and sacrifice. We desire to advance along the King's highway, always aiming to provide gospel advocacy, encouragement, and education so that current- and next-generation church leaders are better equipped to fuel their ministries with principles and practices that glorify the Savior and do good to those for whom He shed His life's blood.

We want to generate a unified effort among all peoples—an effort that is zealous to honor Christ and multiply His disciples, joining in a true coalition for Jesus. Such a biblically grounded and united mission is the only enduring future for the church. This reality compels us to stand with others who are stirred by the conviction that the mercy of God in Jesus Christ is our only hope of eternal salvation. We desire to champion this gospel with clarity, compassion, courage, and joy—gladly linking hearts with fellow believers across denominational, ethnic, and class lines.

Our desire is to serve the church we love by inviting all of our brothers and sisters to join us in an effort to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel of Christ so we truly speak and live for Him in a way that clearly communicates to our age. As pastors, we intend to do this in our churches through the ordinary means of His grace: prayer, ministry of the Word, baptism and the Lord's

Supper, and the fellowship of the saints. We yearn to work with all who seek the lordship of Christ over the whole of life with unabashed hope in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform individuals, communities, and cultures.

In its Women's Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition aims for gospel renewal specifically among and through the women of the church. We desire to support the growth of women in faithfully studying and sharing the Scriptures; in actively loving and serving the church; and in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in all their callings. Women benefit from and contribute to The Gospel Coalition's resources in many ways—on the website, in conference settings, and in various publishing projects. We pray that, through the Women's Initiatives, Jesus will be glorified and the church will be strengthened.

FOREWORD

HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH GOD'S WORD?

OUR PURPOSE

The Bible study you are about to begin may be different from studies you have done in the past. It will not cover a specific topic from many angles. It will not have poetry or stories that leave you laughing, crying, or inspired. It will not focus on answering the question, "What does the Bible say about me?" It will not aid you in self-discovery, at least not as its primary intent.

What it will do is teach you an important passage of the Bible in a way that will stay with you for years to come. It will challenge you to move beyond loving God with just your heart to loving Him with your mind. It will focus on answering the question, "What does the Bible say about God?" It will aid you in the worthy task of God-discovery.

You see, the Bible isn't a book about self-discovery; it's a book about God-discovery. The Bible is God's declared intent to make Himself known to us. In learning about the character of God in Scripture we will experience self-discovery, but it must not be the focus of our study. The focus must be God Himself.

This focus changes the way we study. We look first for what a passage can teach us about the character of God, allowing self-discovery to be the by-product of God-discovery. This is a much better approach because there

can be no true knowledge of self apart from knowledge of God. So when I read the account of Jonah, I see first that God is just and faithful to His Word; He is faithful to proclaim His message to Nineveh no matter what. I see second that I, by contrast (and much like Jonah), am unjust to my fellow man and unfaithful to God's Word. Thus knowledge of God leads to true knowledge of self, which leads to repentance and transformation. This is what Paul meant when he wrote that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (see Rom. 12:2).

Women are good at loving God with their hearts. We are good at engaging our emotions in our pursuit of God. But the God who commands us to love with the totality of our heart, soul, and strength also commands us to love Him with all of our minds. God only commands what He also enables His children to do. Therefore, it must be possible for us to love Him well with our minds, or He would not command it. I know you will bring your emotions to your study of God's Word, and that is good and right. But it's your mind I want to engage. God intends for you to be a good student, renewing your mind and thus transforming your heart.

OUR PROCESS

Being a good student entails following good study habits. When we sit down to read, most of us like to read through a particular passage and then find a way to apply it to our everyday lives. We may read through an entire book of the Bible over a period of time, or we may jump around from place to place. I want to suggest a different approach, one that may not always yield immediate application, comfort, or peace, but one that builds over time a cumulative understanding of the message of Scripture.

Imagine receiving a letter in the mail. The envelope is hand-written, but you don't glance at the return address. Instead you tear open the envelope, flip to the second page, read two paragraphs near the bottom, and set the letter aside. Knowing someone took the time to send it to you, you spend a few minutes trying to figure out how to respond to what the section you just read had to say. What are the odds you will be successful?

No one would read a letter this way. But this is precisely the way many of us read our Bibles. We skip past reading the "envelope"—Who wrote this? To whom is it written? When was it written? Where was it written?—and try to determine the purpose of its contents from a portion of the whole. What if we took time to read the envelope? What if, after determining the context for its writing, we started at the beginning and read to the end? Wouldn't that make infinitely more sense?

In our study we will take this approach with Scripture. We will begin by placing our text in its historical and cultural context. We will “read the envelope.” Then we will read through the entire text multiple times, so we can better determine what it wants to say to us. We will read repetitively so we might move through three critical stages of understanding: comprehension, interpretation, and application.

Stage 1: Comprehension

Remember the reading comprehension section on the SAT? Remember those long reading passages followed by questions to test your knowledge of what you had just read? The objective was to force you to read for detail. We’re going to apply the same method to our study of God’s Word. When we read for comprehension we ask ourselves, “What does it say?” This is hard work. A person who comprehends the account of the six days of creation can tell you specifically what happened on each day. This is the first step toward being able to interpret and apply the story of creation to our lives.

Stage 2: Interpretation

Comprehension asks, “What does it say?” Interpretation asks, “What does it mean?” Once we have read a passage enough times to know what it says, we are ready to look into its meaning. A person who interprets the creation story can tell you why God created the world in a particular order or way. They are able to infer things from the text beyond what it says.

Stage 3: Application

After doing the work to understand what the text says and what the text means, we are finally ready to ask, “How should it change me?” Here is where we draw on our God-centered perspective to ask three supporting questions:

- What does this passage teach me about God?
- How does this aspect of God’s character change my view of self?
- What should I do in response?

A person who applies the creation story can tell us that because God creates in an orderly fashion, we too should live well-ordered lives. Knowledge of God gleaned through comprehension of the text and interpretation of its meaning can now be applied to our lives in a way that challenges us to be different.

SOME GUIDELINES

It's vital to the learning process that you allow yourself to move through the three stages of understanding on your own, without the aid of commentaries or study notes. The first several times you read a passage you will probably be confused. This is actually a good thing. Allow yourself to feel lost, to dwell in the "I don't know." It will make the moment of discovery stick.

Nobody likes to feel lost or confused, but it's an important step in the acquisition and retention of understanding. Because of this, I have a few guidelines to lay out for you as you go through this study:

- I. Avoid all commentaries until comprehension and interpretation have been earnestly attempted on your own. In other words, wait to read commentaries until after you have done the homework, attended small-group time, and watched the video teaching. And then, consult commentaries you can trust. Visit www.mystudybible.com for suggestions.
- II. For the purposes of this study, get a Bible without study notes. Come on, it's just too easy to look at them. You know I'm right.
- III. Though commentaries are off-limits, here are some tools you should use:
 - *Cross-references*. These are the Scripture references in the margin or at the bottom of the page in your Bible. They point you to other passages that deal with the same topic or theme.
 - *An English dictionary* to look up unfamiliar words.
 - *Other translations of the Bible*. We will use the English Standard Version (ESV) as a starting point, and the New International Version (NIV) as our secondary translation. You can easily consult other versions online. Reading a passage in more than one translation can expand your understanding of its meaning. **Note:** A paraphrase, such as the New Living Translation (NLT) or The Message, can be useful but should be regarded as a commentary rather than a translation. Paraphrases are best consulted after careful study of an actual translation.
 - *A printed copy of the text*, double-spaced, so you can mark repeated words, phrases, or ideas. The entire text for this study is provided in the appendix of your workbook in the ESV translation.

STORING UP TREASURE

Approaching God's Word with a God-centered perspective, with context, and with care takes effort and commitment. It's study for the long-term. Some days your study may not move you emotionally or speak to an immediate need. You may not be able to apply a passage at all. But what if 10 years from now, in a dark night of the soul, that passage suddenly opens up to you because of the work you have done today? Wouldn't your long-term investment be worth it?

In Matthew 13, we see Jesus teach in parables. He tells seven deceptively simple stories that leave His disciples struggling for understanding—dwelling in the “I don't know,” if you will. After the last parable He turns to them and asks, “Have you understood all these things?” Despite their apparent confusion, they answer out of their earnest desire with “Yes.” Jesus told them that their newfound understanding makes them “like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old” (Matt. 13:52, NIV).

A storeroom is a place for keeping valuables over a long period of time for use when needed. Faithful study of God's Word is a means for filling our spiritual storerooms with truth, so that in our hour of need we can bring forth both the old and the new as a source of rich provision. I pray that this study would be for you a source of much treasure, and that you would labor well to obtain it.

Grace and peace,

Jen Wilkin

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This workbook is designed to be used in a specific way. The homework will start you down the process of comprehension, interpretation, and application. However, it was designed to dovetail with small-group discussion time and the video teaching. You can use the workbook by itself, but you are likely to find yourself with some unresolved questions. The video teaching is intended to resolve most, if not all, of your unanswered questions from the homework and discussion time. With this in mind, consider using the materials as follows:

- If you are going through the study on your own, first work through the homework and then watch the corresponding teaching video for that week. See lifeway.com/sermononthemount.
- If you are going through the study in a group, first do your homework, then discuss the questions your group decides to cover, and then watch the video teaching.

Note: For week 1 there is no homework. The study begins with a video introduction. You will find a viewer guide on pages 12-13 that you can use as you watch the introductory message.

A MESSAGE FOR GROUP LEADERS

At the end of each week's personal study you will find discussion questions to help you facilitate your small-group time. Each begins with an introductory question to help group members get to know one another and feel comfortable contributing their voices to the discussion. These questions may prove to be most helpful during the early weeks of the study, but as the group grows more familiar with one another, you may decide to skip the introductory question to allow more time to discuss the questions covering the lesson.

Following the introductory question you will find four questions to help group members compare what they have learned from their personal study on days 2 through 5. These questions are either pulled directly from the personal study or they summarize a concept or theme that the personal study covered. Each two-part question covers content from a particular day of the personal study, first asking group members to reflect, and then asking them to apply. The reflection questions typically ask group members to report a finding or flesh out an interpretation. The application questions challenge them to move beyond intellectual understanding to identify ways to live differently in light of what they have learned.

As a small-group leader, you will want to review these questions before you meet with your group, thinking through your own answers, marking where the questions occur in the personal study, and noting if there are any additional questions you might want to reference to help the flow of the discussion. These questions are suggestions only, intended to help you cover as much ground as you can in your discussion time. They should not be seen as requirements or limitations, but as guidelines to help you prepare your group for the video teaching time by allowing them to process collectively what they have learned during their personal study.

As a facilitator of discussion rather than a teacher, you are allowed and encouraged to be a co-learner with your group members. This means you may not always feel confident of your answer to a given question, and that is perfectly OK. Because we are studying for the long-term, we are allowed to leave some questions partially answered or unresolved, trusting for clarity at a later time. In most cases, the video teaching time should address any lingering questions that are not resolved in the personal study or the small-group discussion.

WEEK 1

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

MATTHEW 5:1-2

*¹ Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain,
and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.*

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ...

MATTHEW 5:1-2

Why are there _____?

Who is Jesus' _____ for the Sermon on the Mount?

Primary: _____

Secondary: _____

Why does Jesus _____?

Psalm 80:1-2 Throne

Psalm 99:1 Throne

Hebrews 1:3 Right hand of Majesty

Why is Jesus _____?

Matthew 17:1-13 Transfiguration

Matthew 24 Olivet Discourse

Matthew 28:16-20 The Great Commission

Exodus 19–20 God speaks on Mount Sinai

WHO

IS BLESSED?

WEEK 2

Each week you will start your homework by reading through the entire Sermon on the Mount from start to finish. Then you'll focus in on a particular passage to discover its message and how it fits into the greater context of the sermon as a whole. By the time you complete this study, you will have read the Sermon on the Mount at least nine times. As it grows more familiar to you, watch for how your understanding deepens and expands. Your first task each week will be to note how this process is taking place. To help you read for detail, you'll be asked to mark certain words or phrases in the copy of Matthew 5–7 printed in the back of this book. Keep a set of colored pencils or markers handy as you read.

This week we'll focus our study efforts on dissecting the eight short statements that form the opening to Jesus' longest recorded message—statements commonly known as the Beatitudes. You may be familiar with some or all of them. We'll strive to look at them with fresh eyes, asking ourselves why, of all the ways Jesus could have begun His inaugural address to His disciples, He begins with a list of "blesseds."

DAY 1

Read Matthew 5:1–7:29 on pages 138-144.

As you read, circle each occurrence of the word “righteousness” with a blue pencil or marker. We will be considering its meaning and use on Day 3.

1. Which section of the sermon seems unclear to you?

2. Which section seems most straightforward?

3. Look up the word *beatitude* in the dictionary. Write the definition below:

4. Why do you think Jesus chooses to begin the Sermon on the Mount with a list of “blesseds”?

DAY 2

³ *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

MATTHEW 5:3-4

1. Look up the following passages and note what each teaches us about being poor:

Psalm 40:16-17: _____

Psalm 69:32-33: _____

Psalm 72:12-14: _____

Isaiah 66:2 (*humble* is translated “poor” in the KJV): _____

What kind of poverty is addressed in these verses? _____

2. Webster’s Dictionary defines *poverty* as “the state of one with insufficient resources.”¹ Based on this definition, what does it mean to be “poor in spirit”?

