



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

You have
heard...

Go the extra
mile

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

The plank
in your eye

2017

July

Session 1 – You have heard...

Welcome to the July midweek experience. This month we will focus on the Sermon on the Mount, found in chapters 5-7 of the Gospel of Matthew. Four of our six divine services in July will also focus on the Sermon on the Mount. The two exceptions are July 2nd, which is service for the departed, and July 16th, when we will commemorate a central event in our more recent Church history, namely the second sending of the apostles in the 1830s.

Let's take a few moments to consider the importance of the Sermon on the Mount. It has been described as Jesus' inaugural address, the constitution of the kingdom of God, the authoritative message of the Messiah. Between the divine services and our small group sessions, we will devote about seven hours to the Sermon on the Mount – and we will barely scratch the surface of its teachings.

While that seems daunting, there is another way to look at the Sermon on the Mount. We can summarize it in two words: kingdom conduct.

In His Sermon, Jesus calls upon us to fundamentally change our conduct. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are to change in our relationship with God. We are to change in our heart. We are to change in our relationship with our neighbor.

Let's focus now on chapter 5, beginning with verse 17: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." The "Law" refers to the Mosaic Law, "Prophets" refers to those who proclaimed the word of God in the Old Testament, and "fulfill," in this context, means to "fill out" or "complete." Jesus – Christ, Messiah, True God – will now explain what the law really means for those who inhabit His kingdom. From verses 21 through 48, Jesus takes six different aspects of the law to a new level – to a greater righteousness, if you will. Each time He begins with words like, "You have heard that it was said," and then follows with, "but I say to you."

Let's focus on one law that Jesus addresses, "You shall not murder." In verses 21-22 Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother 'Raca' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."

Jesus is expanding our understanding of the commandment. It is no longer just the act of taking another's life that breaks the commandment. When anger is held within us, or when it is expressed in words such as *idiot* or *fool*, it is evidence of a broken relationship between people, which cannot exist in the kingdom. We can also look to 1 John 3:15, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer..."

Furthermore, our anger against our brother not only disturbs our relationship with him, it also disturbs our relationship with God. Consider 1 John 4:20: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

Jesus explains what needs to be done in such a circumstance: "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

Jesus is teaching that whether we have a grudge against our brother, or whether our brother has a grudge against us, it affects our relationship with God. In the kingdom, there cannot be broken relationships between people. Children of God don't abide broken relationships, they work hard toward reconciliation. They take to heart what Jesus taught at the beginning of His Sermon: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

Jesus concludes His explanation of the fifth commandment with this counsel: "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there

till you have paid the last penny” (Matthew 5:25-26).

Here Jesus is telling us to make use of the available time to reconcile with our adversary who has been wronged. In essence, Jesus is outlawing estrangement between our brother and us. To be right with God, it is no longer sufficient that we abstain from evil actions against our brother. We must also inwardly, in our heart, be reconciled with him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a 20th century Christian minister and theologian, put it this way: “There is therefore only one way of following Jesus and of worshipping God, and that is to be reconciled with our brethren... In Jesus the service of God and the service of the least of the brethren were one.”

This concludes our first session on the Sermon on the Mount. Kindly turn your attention to the study guide. And, please, remember, the questions have been written for a whole range of small groups. Please do not feel obligated to discuss all questions. What is important is to have a Spirit-led, enlightening, and edifying discussion.

Session 2 – Go the extra mile

Welcome to our second session for this series of discussions on the Sermon on the Mount. In our first session, we talked about how Jesus taught new insights and shined a light on teachings from the Old Testament law. Today we will discuss the new perspective Jesus gave on *lex talionis* – the law of retaliation.

In Matthew 5:38-42 we can read, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”

Can you imagine if we all operated under the notion of an eye for an eye today? What would our relationships look like if we did so? Would we have any good relationships? Pondering these questions helps us grasp why Jesus provided clarity on this Old Testament law. The law of retaliation was written for the people of Israel in three of the books of the law – Exodus (21:24), Leviticus (24:20), and Deuteronomy (19:21). This law limited the retribution, or payback, that an offender would have to endure. The law governed all offenses, all the way to a life for a life.

Beginning in verse 39, Jesus teaches a lesson on non-retaliation, the complete opposite of what had been taught for centuries. In order to illustrate the teaching, He used four areas that the audience could relate to: physical attacks, legal suits, government demands, and financial requests. Instead of having an attitude of retribution, Jesus encourages His listeners to have a generous and compassionate attitude towards those who treat them unfairly. He teaches them to respond with forgiveness and love, and to go beyond what was normally expected.

For many, it would seem to be a big request to respond in a non-confrontational, understanding manner when they are treated unfairly. But Jesus demands more of His followers, as He made clear with verse 41. Jesus said, “...and whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.” What did this mean to the immediate audience? The phrase refers to the law of impressment, which entitled the Roman government to press anyone into its service to carry a load as far as one mile. A Roman soldier could impress anyone into service at any time. A great example of this can be seen in the Gospels. The Roman soldiers pulled Simon from Cyrene out of the crowd to assist Jesus in carrying the cross. This law of impressment no doubt caused the people anguish and many probably longed for a day when they could get back at the Romans for these injustices. Jesus uses this example to teach the people that they should demonstrate the love of God in their hearts by not stopping at the required distance but by going another mile.

Simply put, Jesus expects more of us! As those who have been forgiven by His sacrifice and have felt the

impact of His grace, we should treat our fellow man, even those who treat us unfairly, with uncommon compassion and mercy. Our reactions should not be like the norms of our time. When someone shouts words of accusation and anger in our direction, let us respond with kindness. When someone does damage to our property, let us respond with compassion, knowing that we are under God's care and have eternal treasures that go well beyond our natural belongings. As followers of Jesus, let us follow His example and His teaching, and live in a way that shows Him to our world.

Session 3 – The plank in your eye

Welcome to the last small group session of July and the conclusion of our Sermon on the Mount series. In this session, we'll look at Jesus' lesson of removing the plank in your eye.

In Matthew 7:3-5 we read, "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

The message of this passage is simple: we should not point out the faults of others while having yet to identify and work on getting rid of our own faults. But if this concept is so simple to understand, why is it hard to actually do? If we don't **take the time to reflect** on experiences we've had and mistakes that we have made, then we may not truly recognize our own faults. And so maybe we read this passage in Matthew 7 and think it doesn't apply to us, that we don't have many faults, or that they are not important and that we would never judge others for theirs. It is important that we analyze our own behavior and realize that God's Word always applies to us, and that there is always something we can work on within ourselves.

Nobody likes to admit their faults, whether it is to ourselves or to others. When we admit our faults, we make ourselves vulnerable. We are honestly saying that we are not good enough. However, in this moment of truth, we are close to God because we are forced to see our dependence on Him. Only He has the grace to forgive us for our faults, and only He has the strength to help us overcome them. It may be scary to be this open to ourselves and to our God, but making the choice to be honest about our faults shows our trust in Him and allows us to recognize that He will always love and help us.

Identifying our own faults and our need for forgiveness is a crucial element in helping our brothers and sisters with their faults. When there is a plank in our eye, our vision is obscured and it is very hard for us to clearly see and point out the speck in our neighbor's eye. We may even be misguiding others if we attempt to help them with their faults without recognizing our own. In addition, if we point out the mistakes of another while still making our own, we are hypocrites. The word "hypocrite" is perhaps common for us to hear and maybe we don't give it the weight it needs to cause us to change. Maybe we hear this word and think, "Being a hypocrite is bad, but there are worse things one can be." We can look to the first couple of verses in Matthew 7, which connects to the law of retaliation that we discussed last time. Verses 1 and 2 say, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." Being a hypocrite is more than just a label; it is something that has spiritual implications. If we are going to point out others' faults before even addressing our own, then we are judging them and opening ourselves up for judgement from God. This is why it is so important to reflect on our faults and failings, to identify the things we need to change, and to acknowledge our need for forgiveness. Then together we can support and encourage one another as we strive to overcome and follow Christ.

Our love for God finds its expression in loving concern for our brothers and sisters. So while He does not want us to judge each other for our faults, He *has* created us to be in community with one another and depend on each other. Part of this dependence is holding each other accountable. How should we do this? Ephesians 4:15 tells us to "speak the truth in love." This is a big responsibility. Because of our human nature, if we see someone do something wrong, we may feel justified in judging them and making them feel bad for their fault. However, that is not our role to play. We are called to love our neighbor. When we speak to each other in love, that is, when we approach someone who has a speck in their eye, while mindful of the plank in our eye that

God has forgiven, we go in humbleness to help and restore, rather than to hurt and judge. This takes humility and courage, but it is what Jesus calls us to do. We will have to find patience when dealing with one another and strive to understand when it seems difficult. When we are able to do these things, and after we have examined our own shortcomings, then we can better help those around us to remove the specks from their eyes.