

The Sermon on the Mount, from Chapter 10 in *Jesus, Clear and Simple*

This sermon is recorded in The Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 5-7. There were no headings in the original text, so headings in any translation are editorial additions—interpretations. Nor were the headings *The Beatitudes* or *The Lord's Prayer* in the original text. Keep in mind that the headings below describe each section, so the focus can be clear and simple.

THE BLESSINGS

5:3 God's blessing rests on those who are spiritually broken. The Kingdom of the Heavens is for them, and it makes everything new.¹

4 God's blessing rests on those who are overcome with sadness. His immediate comfort is always near.

5 God's blessing rests on those who are treated unfairly. He will help them win in the end.

6 God's blessing rests on those who strive to live correctly. His guidance will bring them peace as they make daily decisions.

7 God's blessing rests on those who are seriously drained from being merciful. His loving presence will keep them filled up.

8 God's blessing rests on those who struggle to keep their heart clean. They will see God is with them.

9 God's blessing rests on those who do not give up making peace. His children are peacemakers, and he will join them in their efforts.

10 God's blessing rests on those who are persecuted for doing what is right. The Kingdom of the Heavens is for them, and it makes everything new.²

11-12 God's blessing will rest on you while you are being insulted, persecuted and slandered because you follow me. Joy will arrive during persecution, because of

¹ Jesus' words in this sermon are in italics.

² Author's note: The Blessings promise the Kingdom of the Heavens makes everything new. This matches *The Sermon on the Mount* and Jesus' initial sermon. Both are about giving people a fresh start.

God's presence.³ His presence has always been with those who follow him despite opposition, like the prophets. Even during persecution his presence—the Kingdom of the Heavens—will give you overflowing joy.

You Will Change the World

¹³You are the salt of the earth. But salt is only valuable if it stays salty. If it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be discarded and trampled by men. I really do understand that you sometimes feel like an old pile of discarded, trampled salt. If you have lost life's richness, it may seem you will never get it back.

¹⁴But here is good news. You are the light which shines throughout the world. Like a city on a hill, your light will be very visible. ¹⁵People do not light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand so it will give light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, so they may praise our Father, who has transformed you with his light. He will receive all of the credit.

Follow Our Father's Guidance, Not Rules

¹⁷Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest part of the law will by any means disappear. Follow the revealed laws. ¹⁹Anyone who breaks the least of God's commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the Kingdom of the Heavens. God will not guide you to break his commandments. ²⁰Extra, man-made rules are the problem. Unless you live more correctly than the scribes and the Pharisees, who have studied all of the extra rules, you will not be able to enter the Kingdom of the Heavens. Doing your very best to follow all of the rules will not get you into the Kingdom of the Heavens. The extra rules make no sense, and can mislead you.

Contempt

²¹As you know, it was said long ago, "Do not murder," and "Whoever murders will not escape judgment." ²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will not escape judgment, anyone who speaks contemptuously to his brother should be censured by the elders, and anyone who calls his brother a

³ "Great is your reward in the heavens" means your reward will arrive in your personal space. Our Father sends joy during persecution, and Jesus lets us know about this as an encouragement: "He will be with you, and will give you joy." This teaching does not mean, "Hang in there, because when you get to heaven you'll get a special reward for being persecuted." It comes just after The Blessings, continuing the idea that our Father helps during times of struggle.

worthless fool will face hell fire. If anger is your problem you dare not ignore it. It leads to contempt, which can escalate, causing long-lasting scars. Murder is certainly not where problems start. That is a "rules approach." You need to deal with contempt before it takes over your heart. That is my approach.

²³Put away contempt. If you are offering a gift to God at the altar and remember you are having a problem with a brother, ²⁴leave your gift there, work things out with your brother and then offer your gift to God. Eliminating contempt in its early stages is far more important than following religious rules.

²⁵There is one more area where contempt can creep into your life—legal matters. Settle things quickly with your adversary so you are not taken before a judge, who could put you in prison. ²⁶Do not take this lightly. Be careful because you could be stuck there until you have paid every penny. Legal fights can sneak into your life and poison your heart.

Lust

²⁷It was also said long ago that you should not commit adultery. That is another "rules approach." Adultery is not where problems begin. ²⁸Here is my approach. Put away lust. Anyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery in his heart. ²⁹It is better to gouge your eye out than to let lust lead you to hell. ³⁰It is better to cut off your right hand than to let lust lead you to hell. Do whatever it takes to deal with lust.

³¹It was also said long ago that it is allowed to dismiss your wife if you give her the right kind of divorce certificate. That rule does not deal with the underlying problem—lust. ³²I say that, apart from adultery, you should not simply dismiss your wife, just because your rules say you can. That leads to lust problems for everyone. Search your heart before you so easily choose divorce.

Dishonesty

³³It was also said long ago that you should not break an oath made to the Lord. As you know, there is a list of rules about how to assure people you are telling the truth, by stating your oath in just the right way. That is an empty tradition. ³⁴⁻³⁵You do not have to make oaths of any sort. Do not swear by heaven or by the earth or by Jerusalem or by anything from the list of rules about making oaths. ³⁶You will not be any more believable if you follow those rules.

³⁷Here is my approach. Put away dishonesty. Let your "yes" be "yes" and let your "no" be "no." People will tell if you are speaking the truth. Even a small amount of dishonesty, like exaggeration, will bring evil, so set your standard for honesty high.

Retaliation

38It was also said that under certain conditions retaliation is allowed. That “rules approach” is wrong. 39-42Here is my approach. Put away retaliation. I say you should not fight back against an evil person. If an evil person strikes you a second time, steals from you a second time, repeatedly pressures you for money or causes you unnecessary physical hardship, do not retaliate. By holding your retaliation in check, an evil person’s intent will be exposed for all to see, and you will be exonerated. Keep your heart free from retaliation, as you seek our Father’s guidance.

43-44One of your rules says, “You are supposed to love your neighbor and hate your enemy,” but here is my approach. I say to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45because that shows you are sons of our Father—you are following his guidance. If you want people to see you are being like our Father, remember this in all of your relationships: God treats everyone identically. He is generous to everyone. His blessings are withheld from no one.⁴ He pours out plenty of sun and nourishing rain on those who love him as well as on those who don’t. 46If you reserve special favors for those who give you special favors, you are no better than tax collectors, who gouge people’s income as a way of life. 47If you are only nice to your family, you are no better than Gentiles, who do the same. 48Treat everyone generously, just like our Father is generous to everyone all of the time. It shows you are following our Father’s guidance when you treat everyone like family.

You will not be able to deceive people about what is really in your heart. People will see whether retaliation shows you are like the evil one, or generosity shows you are like our Father.

False Righteousness

6:1Do not pretend to be a good person, hoping to draw attention to yourself through religious acts which appear “righteous.” Put away false righteousness. Our Father sees your heart. Your empty religious acts will not please Him at all. You will not be rewarded by your Father who sees you all of the time.⁵

2First of all, when you give to the needy do not announce your generosity with trumpets, acting like you are in a theater production.⁶ Your only reward will come from those who pat you on the back for a good performance. 3Your

⁴ Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, 74.

⁵ In this context “Your Father in the heavens” means he is with you in your personal space, so you will not be able to fool him.

⁶ The word which is translated “a hypocrite” can also mean “an actor.”

Father who sees you in secret will reward you openly if you keep to yourself about your gifts to the poor. ⁴In the end, if your heart is generous you will find favor with God.

⁵And secondly, do not make a theatrical production when you pray. If you perform showy prayers in a synagogue or on a street corner, your only reward will be people's praise. Instead, enter your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. He sees you in secret and will reward you openly.

Talk About Everything with Our Father

^{6:7}When you pray do not utter empty words, like the Gentiles. They do not grasp how to pray. They believe if they pray long enough, they will eventually get through to God. ⁸Because our Father knows what you need before you ask, you can get right to the point with him. ⁹Here is how to pray.

“Our Father who is always near,⁷ help us to constantly dwell on your holy name, on your gracious love, and on your majesty.⁸ ¹⁰More than anything, we long for your kingdom. We long for you to reign here on earth as you reign in heaven. Please reign in every part of our lives: ¹¹Help us to trust you for our daily bread; ¹²forgive our offenses in the same way we forgive others; ¹³and do not bring us temptation, but rescue us from evil.”

Clear and Simple

Author's note: “The Blessings” and “Solid in the Storm” are the teachings which begin and end this sermon. Jesus' message is clear in both—the nearness of our Father will help you in times of struggle. We would expect to find the same message in the sermon's center, if it follows a chiastic structure. That is precisely what we see in *The Lord's Prayer*. It is addressed to our Father “in the heavens.” He is always near and he will help us, especially in times of struggle. His words about daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from evil refer to times of struggle.

⁷ A father who is far away “in heaven” does not seem near at all. The Greek manuscript for this verse begins, “Our Father in the heavens,” which is different than “Our Father in heaven.” “The heavens” means, “your personal space.” “Our Father in the heavens” means he is in your personal space—he is really near.

⁸ In Jesus' tradition, to utter God's name causes people to pause, because God's awesomeness gives us more to think about than a single word can convey. It is a very holy a moment to speak his name. In Jesus' culture it was prohibited to utter his name without mentioning his wondrous traits. This translation maintains that tradition. Thus, “your *name*” is translated, “your holy name, your gracious love and your majesty.” This is in keeping with how Jesus' followers, then and now, want to address God. We come before him in awe of his greatness.

Daily Bread. This term comes from Deuteronomy 8, where the Israelites were fighting for survival in the wilderness. “Daily bread” does not refer to the bread we eat. It reminds us of God’s miraculous, daily supply of manna. He led his people through a vast and dreadful desert, a thirsty land full of venomous snakes and scorpions. This is an epic story about God’s help during times of struggle.

Forgiveness. Forgiveness is a struggle we must win, because without it relationships disintegrate. When our Father grants us his forgiveness, we become equipped to forgive as he forgives. This teaching is not so much about what we must do—forgive—as it is about how forgiveness works. When we experience God’s gracious forgiveness, it changes us at our core. It is deeply transformational. We receive the profound experience of what forgiveness is like, which prepares us to be forgiving.

Temptation and Evil. Our prayers need to focus on winning the battle against temptation, and seeking our Father’s deliverance from evil. Apart from his help, destruction is never far away. Our faith is at stake: Will our Father answer our prayers for help with temptation and evil, or will we succumb in times of struggle? Faith tells us to stay in his presence, in a world where temptation and evil abound.

The Sermon on the Mount clearly and simply points out that our Father will be near when we need him most. This idea is central to Jesus’ thinking. We find it in the beginning, middle, and end of this sermon. It is the principle which ties together all of his teachings. Because he is near in times of struggle, we can expect to go from wounded to mature. We can expect he will help us live abundantly, even in a world which is hostile and oppressive.

Forgiveness

¹⁴Put on forgiveness. If you forgive others when they sin against you, our Father who is right by your side will forgive you. ¹⁵If you withhold forgiveness from others, he will withhold forgiveness from you. Our Father knows whether you have a forgiving heart, and cannot guide you if your heart is tainted with unforgiveness.

Spreading Love and Forgiveness

Author’s note: In chapter 2, *The Dimmer-Switch*, we examined a principle which takes place in the Kingdom of the Heavens: As you move closer to our Father, he will move abundantly closer you. That is fundamental. Here is another fundamental principle: As you receive his love and forgiveness, you will become equipped to spread them.

Chapter 8, Connecting the Dots, unpacked Jesus' answer to the question about which is the greatest commandment. Jesus' wowed his listeners by connecting loving God and loving others. There is a flow to his answer. Love begins with God and flows through us to others. Receiving love from God is where spreading his love starts. To be in a loving relationship with God is an experience which transforms a person. The heavenly qualities of God's presence make their way into a heart because of his love. His love in us makes it possible to give love to others. We receive it, it transforms us, and then we can spread what we have received.

That dynamic is also true about forgiveness. Just as love begins with God and flows through us to others, so forgiveness begins with God and flows through us to others. Those who experience God's love will love others, and those who experience God's forgiveness will forgive others. Verses 14 and 15 are about God's nearness and guidance in the area of forgiveness. It is deeply personal and life-changing to receive God's forgiveness. Considering his magnificent greatness and our meager contributions to his kingdom, we can use his assistance in spreading love and forgiveness.

Genuineness

16Put on genuineness. Do not make a theatrical production about how much you suffer when you fast, or your audience's approval will be your only reward. Drawing attention to yourself is empty, and trying to look good never works. 17-18Do not fast in order to appear sincerely religious. When you fast be as cheerful as possible, so no one will know when you are fasting. Our Father who sees you in secret will reward you openly. He knows what is in your heart. You do not have to impress him by acting religious.

19You need to examine your heart if you collect treasures here on earth. Those treasures will be destroyed by moths or rust, or they may be stolen by thieves. They will soon be worthless. 20You should collect treasures in heaven. Seek after those things which have eternal value. 21You will not be able to hide what is in your heart. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

22If your eyes are good they will fill you with light. 23But if your eyes are bad, they will fill with great darkness. Your eyes will show everyone your heart's desires about what is good or evil.

24This is what you need to know about genuineness and your heart: No one can serve two masters. You will not fool people when you falsely act religious or when you pursue great wealth. Your heart will declare who you are. You cannot serve God and your own desires.

Peacefulness

25Put on peacefulness. Do not worry about your life, what you eat and what you wear. Is not your life more important than food and clothes?

26Do not worry about your life. Look at the birds around you. They get along just fine relying on God's care. They do not worry about stockpiling food, yet our Father feeds them. Can you not see that our Father, who is always with you, places a much higher value on you than on birds?

27Do not worry about appearances. Can any of you grow a single inch by worrying? 28What good can come from worrying about how your clothes look? See how the lilies of the field grow without worrying about their appearance, 29and yet King Solomon in all his glory was not as well-dressed! 30If God provides lilies as a beautiful covering for the grasses of the field, which are here today and gone tomorrow, can you not trust he will provide suitable clothing for you? You are a person of small faith, if you cannot believe he will provide.

31Do not worry about food and clothing. 32People who do not know our Father seek after those things, but he is right beside you. He knows exactly what you need. 33Above all else, seek his kingdom and his righteousness, and he will generously provide.

34So do not worry at all about tomorrow, even though you could find enough evil to worry about in every "tomorrow" if you tried. Drop your worries. You can rely on him to take care of you.

Loving Relationships

7:1-2When you judge others as inferior, you are the inferior one. People will judge you the same way you judge others.

3Look at your own faults, not others'. When you are critical of the sawdust speck in your brother's eye, it is like having a wooden beam in your own eye. 4-5How ridiculous it is to try to help your brother with a speck in his eye while a beam is in yours! Take charge of your own life so you will be more effective in helping others.

6Be careful not to push religion on people. In all of your relationships preserve what is holy, but do not fight about who is right. Your pushiness could get out of hand, and that would be like trying to recover a holy book from a vicious pack of dogs, or retrieving precious pearls from a herd of swine. You could be torn to pieces. Do not be confrontational about what is sacred.

7-8It is far better to build relationships on the right qualities. You will find fulfillment in relationships which are based on a deep interest in each other. Be up front and clear, ask people for what you need, seek to cooperate with them, and knock on their door. Take initiative. Make things happen. These are trustworthy principles which will help you build loving relationships.

9-11Manipulating people will not work. Ask our Father for his help in all of your relationships. Follow his example. He is not like a father who would manipulate his son. When a boy asks for bread, a father could put a smooth, round stone on his plate, and tell him it is a roll. Or when a boy asks for a fish to eat, he could try to manipulate him by giving him a snake. What kind of a father would mislead his son like that? Even bad parents give good gifts to their children. Our Father, who is always near, will be very generous when you call out to him. Ask Him to help you develop good relationships.

Summing up "loving relationships:" It is crucial to treat people in a way which does not make them feel inferior, and recognizes things could get out of hand if you confront them. Here are some keys in building loving relationships: Maintain your integrity. Don't manipulate. Take initiative. Rely on our Father. Ask Him to assist you as you build loving relationships. ¹²Here is a guiding principle which will help you be consistent, and will help you live in accordance with the law and the prophets. "Treat others as you would like to be treated." This will make it clear to everyone that you practice what you preach about loving relationships.

Integrity

¹³⁻¹⁴Accept my challenge to invite our Father into every area of your life. That will make it clear you practice what you preach about integrity. If you follow all of my teachings you will be on the right path. Follow me by entering through the narrow gate, and by staying on the pathway even though it is narrow. Most people enter the wide gate and take the broad road, which leads to destruction. Do not miss entering through the narrow gate. It is the way to life, but there are few who find it.

¹⁵But even if you enter by the narrow gate you will need to watch out for false teachers. They are like wolves in sheep's clothing. You will be able to tell they are false by their lack of integrity. That speaks loudly about what is really in their heart. ¹⁶If you look at a piece of fruit you immediately know what kind of a tree it comes from. You do not pick sweet grapes from a thorn bush, nor tasty figs from a thistle bush. ¹⁷⁻²⁰Good fruit comes from good trees, and corrupt fruit comes from corrupt trees. They need to be chopped down and burned. False prophets' lack of integrity will show they are corrupt. Get rid of them.

21You also need to watch out for people who falsely say they have entered through the narrow gate. Not everyone who addresses me as “Lord” will enter the Kingdom of the Heavens. Such people believe they can fool the world, but everyone can see they have no integrity. People can tell if our Father is in charge of their personal space.

22I know who is pretending to live from a pure heart. When judgment day comes, many people will say to me they were prophesying in my name, casting out demons in my name, and performing mighty miracles in my name. 23But they lacked integrity, and were not following my path. On judgement day I will tell them, “I never knew you. Depart.”

Solid in the Storm

24-27Here is a closing picture for you. It is not enough if you just hear my words. You must put them into practice. When your life is built on my teachings, it will be like a wise man who built his house on a solid rock. When the rains came, the streams rose, and the winds beat against the house, it did not fall. Just like him, you will withstand any storm if my teachings are your foundation. But if you hear my words and do not put them into practice, that will be like building your house on sinking sand. When the rains come and the streams rise, the winds will sweep your house away.

28When Jesus had finished, the people were astounded. He spoke with authority as no one before Him.

Summing Up

Jesus' mission was to transform broken people into maturing members of his kingdom. He drew struggling people into his kingdom at that time, and he still draws them. They are devoted to staying on the narrow path. That is where the joy of the Lord prevails. Our Father's hands-on help leads them to live abundantly. They are the people who will change the world.