Sermon on the Mount
Bible Study Notes
Matthew 5-7
HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE
The goal of any Bible study is not “to get through all the questions” but rather come to a deeper understanding of God’s word and to live it out.

With this being said, you will notice that there is way too much information and far too many questions than could be asked and answered during each Bible study.

The purpose of these notes is to give the Bible study leaders some background to the different passages that are being studied and enable you to use the questions that you feel are best suited to the group.

As there is so much material, you may choose to limit yourself to a smaller section of text to cover it more deeply.

INTRODUCTION
Jesus comes preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matthew 4:17), that is, "Turn from your shallowness and sins. Change your hearts and your ways, and turn to God. For God's Kingdom is near, it is now, it breaking in upon you even as I speak."

So what does Jesus have in mind when he calls for repentance and change? Is it something radically different than the religions of his age or ours? What he begins to teach his followers is not a formalized religion, really. Jesus teaches a new heart attitude towards God and people, an attitude that runs counter to human nature.

Our world tells us to invest for the future, to command the highest salary we can, and to accumulate wealth. Jesus tells us not to store up treasures on earth lest we make money our God. He tells us not to obsess over making a living, but to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

We build great institutions by naming buildings after the big donors, and putting little donors' names on pretentious plaques. Jesus says that when we give we are to do it secretly, anonymously.

Modern-day tolerance tells us all will find their way into God's presence some day and that many roads and religions lead to the Creator. But this radical Teacher from Galilee says that the gate to his kingdom is a small one, and the alternative road is broad and well-travelled and leads to destruction.

You see, what Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount isn’t warmed over religion. It is a call to a radical change. A change in attitude and heart. A change in values and lifestyle.

John Stott writes that the Sermon on the Mount, "It is the nearest thing to a manifesto that [Jesus] ever uttered, for it is his own description of what he wanted his followers to be and to do. To my mind, no two words sum up its intention better, or indicate more clearly its challenge to the modern world, than the expression 'Christian counter-culture.'"

The text of Matthew 5-7 seems to be a single literary unit, intended for us to understand as a teaching that begins with Jesus sitting down before the crowds on the mountainside in 5:1-2, and ending with Jesus finishing, leaving the listeners amazed at the boldness and authority of his words in 7:28-29.
In outlining the Sermon on the Mount, it is often divided into several themes:

1. Kingdom People (5:1-16)
2. The Spirit of the Law & Reconciliation (5:17-48)
3. Living as Followers (6:1-18)
4. The Dangers of Materialism (6:19-34)
5. Judging Self and Others (7:1-29)

**Kingdom of Heaven**

The "kingdom of heaven" is a common catch cry in Matthew’s gospel, but what does it mean? Is it the same as the phrase "kingdom of God"? The most likely explanation is that Matthew was writing especially for a Jewish audience who were careful not to utter the name of God, lest they be guilty of breaking the Third Commandment, "to take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

When you see "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew, it means exactly the same thing as "kingdom of God" in the other gospels. It refers to the Reign of God which has come in the person of Jesus Christ himself, and will culminate in the return of Jesus and his reign on earth, the time looked forward to in the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). The Kingdom is now in the presence of the Jesus in our lives through his Spirit. Yet we look forward to the future when that down payment we've received (Ephesians 1:14), will be completed when the King returns and establishes his kingdom on earth where there was once human resistance and rebellion.

**The Religion of the Pharisees**

If we are to understand the Sermon on the Mount, we need to understand who the Pharisees are, since Jesus' exposition of what his Kingdom is like is contrasted with the dominant form of Judaism prevalent in Palestine in Jesus' time, as exemplified in the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were a strict religious sect within Judaism that functioned as a political interest group seeking to reform society by bringing about a strict adherence to the Law, especially as it related to ritual purity.

The name "Pharisee" is apparently derived from a Hebrew word, meaning "the separated ones" or "separatists." The term "Pharisee," however, was what those outside the sect called them. The Pharisees themselves apparently didn't have a name for their movement. Rather they considered themselves the true Israel, and referred to themselves as "sages. After the destruction of the temple, they used the title "rabbi" for sages.

The Pharisees, as a whole, were not the ruling class, though they sought to influence the ruling class. Nor were they of the priestly class, who tended to conform to the teachings of another religious sect, the Sadducees. Nor were they professional scholars like the "scribes" or "teachers of the law" (though some of these professional scholars identified themselves as Pharisees). The Pharisees were part of a voluntary lay movement that sought to bring a renewed understanding and enforcement of ritual purity in Palestine.
The Pharisees were passionately devoted to the Torah (law). In the course of their study and application of the law they built up a body of traditional interpretation and application of the law known as "the tradition of the elders." Since the Pharisees were passionate in their desire to obey God's law, they had developed over time an oral tradition, "the tradition of the elders," that put a "hedge" or fence around the Biblical commandments. The idea was that obedience to the tradition of the elders formed a barrier that would prevent a pious Jew from breaking a Biblical commandment itself. Over time, this "tradition of the elders" became a law unto itself, and it is with this oral tradition that we find Jesus clashing.
**STUDY 1) MATTHEW 5:1-16 KINGDOM PEOPLE**

In our day teachers stand to teach, but in Jesus' day the rabbis sat, and Jesus followed in this great tradition. Crowds of eager listeners were following him, and so he sought a site that they could hear him well. Tradition places the Sermon on the Mount on a gentle hill between Capernaum and Tabgha, at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus would have had the beauty of this inland lake behind him as he taught, but all eyes were on him. Because Jesus spoke like no one they had ever heard. This section is often called "The Beatitudes".

**BLESSED ARE THE...**

The idea of blessing has a long and rich tradition in the Old Testament. The blessings of God begin in Genesis where God blesses the animals, and then man, saying, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it..." (Genesis 1:28).

The Hebrew equivalent is bārak, which occurs 415 times in the Old Testament. To bless in the Old Testament means to endue with power for success, prosperity, fruitfulness, longevity, etc. The idea is of conferring or imparting something. Often this is done through the laying on of hands or the lifting of hands.

The word "Beatitude" comes from the Latin root beatus, "happy," from the past participle of Latin beare, "to bless." So the word "The Beatitudes" means "The Blessings." It is only a happy coincidence of the English language that the idea of "be-attitudes" or "attitudes of being" is suggested by the word Beatitude.

In the Beatitudes Jesus explains just who are the recipients of God's blessing, that is, his favour and grace. Not those whom the world sees as successful, but those whose spirits yearn for God. They are the truly blessed ones, and the extent of their blessedness will become fully apparent at the end of the age when the superficiality of the world's standards will be exposed for what it is, and when those whose hearts belong to God are honoured and judged righteous in his kingdom.

Jesus' first Beatitude is a paradox then. "How can the poor in spirit possess the kingdom?" The answer is this: Only those who are aware of their spiritual poverty will be seeking more. And those who seek the riches of Christ will possess his kingdom. You see this same theme in those who mourn, are meek, and who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

**BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT (5:3)**

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

Who are the poor in spirit? Certainly not the religious leaders as they were filled with a kind of haughty superiority over the common people. Jesus is saying that those who aren't puffed up with their own spiritual superiority are the real possessors of the kingdom -- the spiritual zeroes, those who have struggled with life and have come up short. They are the heirs of the kingdom.

Jesus' mission was "to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18). The good news, the really excellent news he proclaimed was that the kingdom was not for the morally superior but for the poor in spirit. A physician doesn't come to make the healthy well, but for those who are sick (Matthew 9:12). Jesus came for those who were aware of their own spiritual poverty and hungry for more.
BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN (5:4)

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

How can those who mourn be comforted? Who is mourning? The poor in spirit. Those who feel distanced from God. The hurt and oppressed. The ones in pain who feel alone. They mourn. And Jesus offers them comfort, comfort with his own blessing and warmth and healing and salvation.

But sometimes believers mourn, too. Jesus mourned over the fate of those who turn away from him to their own empty philosophies of life. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate." (Matthew 23:37-38)

We mourn when we see degradation and unrighteousness and injustice around us. We cannot afford to become inured to it, or accepting of sin. We must grieve inwardly or be untrue to the values of our Master. Ezekiel's vision recalls God's command to a man clothed in linen with a writing kit at his side: "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it." (Ezekiel 9:3-4) Sometimes we weep over the delay in justice, as did the martyrs in John's Revelation: "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (Rev. 6:10)

But the ultimate and final comfort will come at the end. We are given this promise, and this promise we hold onto: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:4-5) What is the answer to this riddle of the mourners being blessed by comfort? We mourn in our emptiness and purposelessness and pain, and are comforted by Jesus' salvation and the presence of his Spirit. We mourn with Jesus, too, and are comforted by his Return and the consummation of his Reign.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK (5:5)

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

But what does it mean to be meek? Many people think it means "wimpy"! Blessed are the wimpy, for they will inherit the earth? I don't think so!

The word translated "meek" means "pertaining to not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, gentle, humble, considerate, meek' in the older favourable sense." This is confusing for us, since English has two definitions for "meek": (1) "enduring injury with patience and without resentment, mild," and (2) "deficient in spirit and courage, submissive.

Jesus didn't mean "blessed are the deficient in courage." Rather, he meant "enduring injury with patience and without resentment." Jesus uses this word to describe himself in Matthew 11:29: "... For I am gentle [meek] and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Jesus is certainly not lacking in courage!

But Jesus was gentle, humble, and considerate. He cared about people and the way he treated them reflected this love. In Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), we see this quality in the
character traits "patience, kindness, goodness" and the word itself is used: "gentleness" (NIV) or "meekness" (KJV).

But those in the world who want to make something of themselves don’t value meekness. Instead they push themselves in front of others, promote themselves, and climb the ladder to success over the bodies of their fellows. Get ahead, that’s the way to inherit the earth.

And herein lies the paradox. The meek, not the proud, will inherit the earth. That is because the King embodies love at its highest, courage at its greatest, humbling himself to the lowest, in order to save to the uttermost those who are lost.

The world doesn’t understand such a King, nor does it understand Jesus. It is attracted to Jesus, but it finally rejects his way as impractical. "I'll do it myself," they promise. "I'll pull myself up by my own bootstraps. I'll be captain of my soul, and no one will tell me what to do" - the antithesis of meekness. And here is the riddle. Those who trust in themselves rather than God will be left with nothing, blessing-less, while the meek, the humble, the “trusters-in-God”, will inherit the earth and God's blessing. How much we actually believe this will be clearly reflected in the decisions we make and in the way we live.

**BLESSED ARE THE HUNGRY FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (5:6)**

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

A fourth characteristic of citizens of the Kingdom is an intense hunger and thirst for righteousness. What kind of righteousness? Moral perfection? That doesn't exist this side of heaven? The way to heaven is not the same path as the road to worldly success. Jesus offers a blessing to those who seek righteousness with all their heart, who thirst for it. And he promises that they will be filled with it. What a strange and wonderful promise: Those who seek righteousness will find it; those who thirst for righteousness will be filled to the brim with it.

The fulfilment of this blessing, of course, is not by human effort. That was epitomized by the law-keeping of the Pharisees that failed to touch the human heart. The fulfilment, of course, is the blessing of the Kingdom itself, the presence and powerful working of God’s Spirit within his people. You may hate yourself for your sin and long to be righteous. Desire it, ache for it. And Jesus promises you that you will receive that righteousness. What a blessing! It is a costly blessing, to be sure. The way God extends this righteousness to you is by offering you his own in exchange for yours: "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." (1 Peter 3:18)

How can those who despise true righteousness receive this blessing? This Beatitude, like the others, requires a change of heart to receive it.

**BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL (5:7)**

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

On the cross, Jesus prayed, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Could you or I have said that? Could we have felt it and said it? Jesus did. In Pilate he saw the extremity of grasping -- selfish power grasping. In the Pharisees he observed a pious hypocrisy and in the soldiers the
callous disregard for human life -- men who crucified him and then gambled for his clothing as he hung gasping for breath above them on the cross. Above all that pettiness and evil he extended forgiveness.

The powers that be in this world do not admire mercy. They admire passionless, difficult decisions that get the job done. They admire ruthlessness. And if they don't really admire it in others, they excuse their own practice of it as a show of strength of character and resolve.

Do we Christians really love mercy? Don't we instead offer judgment in the place of love and condemnation in the place of grace? Showing mercy does not mean that we condone evil. We believers know of our own sin, and that only God's mercy saves us, and so we extend this mercy to others. Mercy is a banner of glory. Mercy is a badge of honour. Mercy is good news to a guilt-ridden, neurotic world that desperately needs to hear the merciful words of Jesus.

This kind of mercy scarcely fits the world's ideal of strength, no more than do the other Beatitudes. But in this riddle we find the gospel: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." The merciful are the ones who are aware of their own need and of God's mercy to them. It is no wonder that Jesus incorporates this joining of mercy-giving and mercy-receiving into his model prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). Jesus' way knows nothing of condemning forgivees, only of forgiveness. In acting like God ourselves, we receive God's blessing.

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART (5:8)

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

Is there any such thing as purity of heart? The answer can only be yes when we look at Jesus. Purity of heart for him was not a naive ignorance of lust, corruption, and evil. He knew what it was: a single-eyed devotion to his Father. His purity consisted in serving his Father fully and always -- purity of heart with courage, purity of heart when in danger for his life. We see purity of heart in Jesus.

Jesus' promise in this Beatitude is that the pure in heart will be blessed with the ability to see and know and discern God himself. Those whose lives are filled with compromise and conformity, lust and licentiousness cannot see God. They cannot know him. None of us can, for that matter. Since we all have a flawed heart, we must reach out to God himself to purify our hearts and cleanse them.

When the prophet Isaiah was called in the year King Uzziah died, he says, "I saw the Lord, seated on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple." He cries out, "Woe to me. I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." Then he tells of an angel who brought a live coal from the altar, touched his lips with it, and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for" (Isaiah 6:1-7).

God is able to purge the corruption of our hearts and make them pure again. And, like Isaiah, give us that holy vision of God. The Book of Revelation closes with the promise of intimacy with God: "They will see his face!" (Revelation 22:4). And so purity of heart is an earmark of Jesus' disciples. Not perfection -- yet. But hearts cleansed and made pure by Christ himself. And hearts that actively seek that purity that allows an
intimacy with the Lord. Jesus' disciples are those, who prefer closeness to God to the allurements of sin. And he promises, "They will see God."

**BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS (5:9)**

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."

Peacemakers are an endangered breed. But Jesus says, cryptically, in this Beatitute, that "they will be called sons of God." Why? Because the Only Begotten Son of God, was the quintessential Peacemaker, the Prince of Peace, placing his own life in jeopardy to reconcile us to God. His hands were stretched out dangerously wide on the cross, his shoulders ached, as he held God's hand in one and man's hand in the other, and brought them together in his own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24).

Jesus calls us, too, to be peacemakers, reconcilers. Yes, it will be costly. We will be misunderstood and despised by many. Jesus was. But we will be doing God's work and God will reward us. And so Jesus' riddle about the messy task of peacemaking is answered in the profound promise, "they will be called sons of God." What a character profile to live up to!

**BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED (5:10-12)**

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Here's another riddle, harder to understand than those that preceded it: the persecuted are the blessed ones. This seems to run in the face of logic!

Yes, Jesus says. Though they are discriminated against and attacked by men, yet God will bless them for remaining true to the righteous living that they stand for. They refuse to back down in the face of threats because they are sold out to God and God will honour them for it. They may have earned the hatred and malice of men, but they have earned the favour of God himself for their courage and he will reward them with possession of the kingdom of heaven.

Sometimes it's difficult to see the glory in persecution. It is bigoted. It is ugly. It is unfair and unfounded. We suffer shame and pain for what we stand for and wonder if it is ultimately worth it. Yes, shouts Jesus, it is worth it. Look at it for what it is: The reward for conformity to the world's shabby political correctness is shame. And the reward for standing for righteousness is an eternal one. There is no comparing the two. How can we doubt? Yet sometimes we do. We begin to understand when we look at our Master who marked the path clearly before us.

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:2-3)

The Blessing of the Persecuted (5:10) moves quickly to the Blessing of Those who are Insulted and Falsely Maligned because of Jesus (5:11). This is probably an example of Hebrew parallelism, where verse 10 and
verse 11 state the same truth in slightly different words. Jesus concludes this string of blessings with another amazing declaration: "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven." (5:12)

How can we rejoice in the hot breath of slander? How can we be glad in the face of evil? By looking beyond it to the goal. Men and women of character have always done this. They have endured the pain of the moment for the fulfilment of the promise.

We are blessed when we are persecuted, because persecution means that we have been seen. That we have been heard. That our actions have been taken note of by the powers that be and have made their mark. That we have done something right enough, for a change, to deserve persecution -- something that puts us in the same class as the prophets whom Jesus so honoured for their faith and courage. Something that puts us in the same class as Jesus himself, who suffered persecution.

What an audacious statement, that we might be in a class with Jesus himself! But that is the point of his statement. We are blessed when we are persecuted in that we receive a prophet's reward. No, we have not been elevated here by our own blind and selfish zeal. But by God's grace we are enabled to enjoy a wonderful privilege, to be counted among the choice ones of God. Paul was once a persecutor, but now he counted it an immense privilege to share in "the fellowship of Christ's sufferings" (Philippians 3:10), to "fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions" (Colossians 1:24).

LIVING AS SALT AND LIGHT (5:13-16)

In verses 13-16 Jesus tells two simple parables and draws conclusions from them. Using parables was a characteristic teaching method for Jesus. He chose two simple concepts -- salt and light -- and expounded from them principles for living.

A proper amount of salt (sodium chloride, NaCl) is essential to sustain life, so ancient peoples traded whatever was required to obtain it. In Palestine, most salt came from salt caves in the area around the Dead Sea. Both ancient and modern peoples have used salt as both (1) a food preservative, and (2) to bring out the flavour of foods (Job 6:6; Colossians 4:6). It was also used to make covenants and mixed with sacrifices. There is much more evidence in the Bible of salt being used as seasoning, and in this parable Jesus seems to be referring more to salt's taste than its effects.

Salt was used with sacrifices as a way of honouring the King to whom the sacrifices were made (Leviticus 2:13; Ezra 6:9; Ezekiel 43:24). Salt was used in the making of covenants (Numbers 18:19). We read of its ability to add flavour to food (Job 6:6), and Paul writes, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:6).

Here, as in Jesus' parable of Christians being the salt of the earth, salt has to do with witness and conversation. Thus the primary meaning of "You are the salt of the earth" has to do with a willingness to live our lives with the "tang" of our faith intact. We're under so much pressure to give up our differences and blend in with society. Believers are to be "tangy" rather than bland and insipid in the way we live and speak.

The salt the Israelites obtained was often impure, mixed with alkali salts from around the Dead Sea. Water could leach out the sodium chloride, leaving the other salts intact, so that it looked like salt but tasted...
insipid. This seems to be the basis of Jesus' warning about salt losing its saltiness. The essential Christ-inspired difference in our lives can be leached out by the constant flow of the world's values through our lives.

If we no longer stand boldly and faithfully for Jesus, we become worthless to him. Less than worthless, in fact, since by our mild claims of our Christianity we act as a counterfeit of the real salt. Worthless, insipid, tangy-less salt is good for nothing except for throwing on the pathway to keep the grass from growing on it.

Jesus' second parable about uncompromising witness has to do with light. In Jesus' day, homes were commonly lit by small clay lamps which could be held in the palm of the hand. The most primitive consisted of a saucer to hold the olive oil, in which was immersed one end of a wick that lay in an indentation or spout in the rim.

In explaining the concept of making one's witness clear, Jesus introduces a third parable, "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden" (5:14b). Cities were usually situated on hilltops for protection against attack. It is much more difficult to storm a walled city running uphill, and defenders have always known that victory must be claimed by capturing and holding the high ground. Jesus' point, however, is not a city's defence, but its visibility because of its elevated position. In the same way, he continues, a lampstand would elevate the lamp for greatest illumination within a room.

Now Jesus comes to the point: letting people see your good works rather than hiding them. And here is the reason for a Christian's witness: "that [men] may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Both salt and light are worthless if they are saltless or hidden from view. Jesus gives these parables right after a discussion of persecution. So we must be willing to bear our witness, even though it may bring persecution. Indeed, Paul says, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). It comes with the territory. The purpose of our witness is to let our light shine so clearly that people can see God clearly in our works and in our deeds, and evoke praise to him.

Our witness must consist of both deeds and words that point to God the Father and bring glory to him.
STUDY 2) MATTHEW 5:17-48 THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW & RECONCILIATION

What did Jesus intend to accomplish? Did Jesus come to do away with the Old Testament? This very question is at the heart of Jesus' controversy with the Pharisees. Jesus doesn't seem concerned to follow the meticulous legal observance of the Pharisees. He heals on the Sabbath. His disciples nibble at grain plucked on the Sabbath. They don't even wash their hands in the prescribed manner. What kind of religion is Jesus propagating? Doesn't he care about the Law?

NOT TO ABOLISH BUT TO FULFIL (5:17)

Jesus states his position very clearly: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them."

"The Law" refers especially the Torah or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. "The Prophets" include both the writings of the Prophets (what we call the major and minor prophets) as well as Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles (what we call the historical books). Jesus' phrase "The Law and the Prophets" refers to the whole of the Old Testament Scripture.

The word translated "abolish" (NIV) or "destroy" (KJV) is means, "destroy, demolish, dismantle," here, "to end the effect of something" so that it is no longer in force, "do away with, abolish, annul, make invalid, repeal." This is a strong word, used, for example, of the destruction of the temple in Matthew 24:2; 26:61; 27:40. So with it Jesus emphatically denies coming to destroy the law.

Rather he has a very positive view of the law. He speaks in verse 17 like he is on a mission: "I have come ...." He has a very deliberate task before him, to fulfill the law and the prophets. The word translated "fulfil" has the basic meaning of "to make full, fill (full)." It can also mean "bring something to completion, finish something already begun." Or "to bring to a designed end, fulfil" a prophecy, an obligation, a promise, a law, a request, a desire, a hope, a duty, a fate, a destiny, etc. Or "to bring to completion an activity in which one has been involved from its beginning, complete, finish." The precise meaning of this common word must be determined by its context.

Certainly Jesus came to make the law itself full. The Pharisees, in their attempt to obey legalistic minutiae had prescribed and limited the application of the law. Jesus wants his followers to see what the law really implies -- which is far beyond the Pharisees' safe interpretations. For example, when the law said, "You shall not kill," explains Jesus, it means more than the act of murder, but the anger and lack of respect for a person that motivate the act (5:21-26). Jesus gives the same sort of reinterpretation to popular concepts of adultery (5:27-30), divorce (5:31-32), oath-taking (5:33-37), retaliation (5:38-42), and love for enemies (5:43-48). Helping people to understand the full depth and spirit of the law is certainly part of his mission.

JOTS AND TITLES (5:18)

It is important to see how emphatically Jesus spoke these words. He wanted everyone to see how deeply he honoured and believed the words of the Law and the Prophets. He begins with the phrase, "I tell you the truth ...." It is used as a preface or solemn formula of affirmation to some of Jesus' most definitive statements, and means "truly," and is literally the word "amen." Next he said,... Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law
"until everything is accomplished." (5:18) In other words, Jesus didn't just come to round out the big themes of the Bible, but to fulfil or accomplish even the tiny prophecies and verses.

**PRACTICING AND TEACHING (5:19)**

But it is followed by an even stronger sentence: "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

This should set us on our heels. If we think that we can ignore the teachings of the Old Testament, we'd better think again. Jesus holds us responsible to both practice and teach to our children the commandments of the Lord. We hear a lot of talk about grace, but Jesus speaks pretty clearly here and elsewhere of commandments and obedience. (See, for example, John 14:15; 15:10; 1 John 2:3; 3:22, 24; 5:3.) A disciple's life is one of learning and following his master.

**SURPASSING THE PHARISEES' RIGHTEOUSNESS (5:20)**

Jesus also makes it clear that he isn't talking about a new legalism. The Pharisees were devotees of rigorous law-keeping of the minutiae of the law as it had been passed down to them in an oral tradition called "the tradition of the elders." Tithing herbs from the garden and dribbling water on the tips of one's fingers and allowing it to run down to the wrist were part of this scrupulous observance.

Among the common people, the Pharisees were considered in some ways as the holiest of people. If they weren't keeping the law adequately, how could anyone keep it? So Jesus' next statement must have shocked his hearers and angered the Pharisees: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." (5:20)

How could anyone's righteousness surpass that of the most righteous people in the land? In the remainder of the chapter, Jesus begins to explain how a right observance of the law is not a superficial fulfilment of the exterior, but a living out of the very spirit of the law. And he explains what he means by contrasting with the true spirit of the law what was the popular view of certain commands -- murder, adultery, divorce, oath-taking, retaliation, and hating enemies.

**THE SPIRIT OF RECONCILIATION (5:21-26)**

Each of these subjects begins with an interesting phrase, "You have heard that it was said ... but I tell you ..." (5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44. This is not the word Jesus uses to quote the Old Testament. It becomes obvious by the time you come to the quotation in 5:43, that he is quoting the oral tradition, the "tradition of the elders," not the scripture directly. Yes, the Pharisees quoted the Pentateuch, but they went beyond it with their own interpretation, limiting and circumscribing its meaning. Jesus is explaining the actual spirit of the Law, as only God Himself can expound it.

**MURDER AND ANGER (5:21-22)**

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'" (5:21) The Sixth Commandment is "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Certainly those who murder will be subject to judgment. The "tradition of the elders" would agree.
But Jesus goes to the heart of the Law as he expounds the motivation behind murder -- anger. "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (5:22)

"Raca" was a term of abuse, a put-down relating to lack of intelligence, numskull, fool (in effect verbal bullying)," derived from the Aramaic word meaning "empty one," or, "empty-head."

This ought to scare us. Who hasn't been angry and insulted someone? Of course, we can get legalistic and say that we haven't used the exact word "Raca" or "fool." But that is the same kind of word gymnastics for which Jesus condemned the Pharisees. Jesus is saying that we are guilty before God for a heart that lashes out in anger and venom. Whether or not a person's life is terminated as a result is not the point. Anger, and the vile venom it inspires, kill the spirit. And those who spew this acid on those about them are not free from judgment. The God who condemns murder also condemns angry insult, for they both come from the same root.

FIRST, GO BE RECONCILED TO YOUR BROTHER (5:23-24)

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (5:23-24)

So if anger, murder, and insult are condemned by the Law as expounded by Jesus, what is approved by the law? What is the positive command we are to fulfil? Be reconciled to each other.

How do we fulfil this law? If we are worshipping and remember that someone has something against us, we are to leave our gift behind and first be reconciled to them. After we have done that, we can come back and resume our worship.

But Jesus' clear point is that worship -- seeking to honour God by bringing an offering -- is a mockery if we don't first repent of our sins and carry out that repentance to its logical conclusion. That point isn't radical.

Jesus' words, "First, go and be reconciled to your brother," imply that you have offended someone and need to make amends. There may well be estrangement that we have little to do with and cannot change. The willingness to reconcile must be shared by the other party. Sometimes we have hurt someone deeply and it is fully our fault, but when we go to humble ourselves and seek forgiveness we are snubbed. We may be snubbed, but we must still go and seek reconciliation.

Reconciliation may be possible if we will humble ourselves. And even if it is not possible, we must make a sincere attempt if we would seek to fulfil the spirit of the Law. After all, the Law is not really about murder and stealing. It is about love and reconciliation. That is the spirit of the Law.

SETTLE MATTERS QUICKLY WITH YOUR ACCUSER (5:25-26)

Jesus concludes this teaching on reconciliation with an example from a mini-parable.
The parable assumes that you owe your accuser a debt of some kind, and to collect on it they are taking you to small claims court. Jesus is saying: Don't wait until you get to court to work out some kind of deal; settle out of court. Because if the court has to decide the matter, you will be thrown into debtor's prison and won't get out until every last cent is paid.

We don't have debtor's prisons today, but they were common in some western legal systems until recently. If a person is in prison he can't work to repay his debt. But what happened when you were thrown into debtor's prison, was that your family and friends would come up with the money in order to get you out. So in this mini-parable, Jesus is saying, settle quickly, before you get to court. Settle quickly or you’ll be stuck for every last cent that is due.

What is the point of the parable in this context? Jesus is teaching his hearers to reconcile quickly with those they have wronged and not to put it off. The implication is that if they wait for God to settle the matter at his bar of justice, that judgment will exacting and harsh punishment.

You remember that this teaching on murder began with the concepts of accountability and justice: "... subject to judgment ... answerable to the Council ... in danger of the fire of hell." Jesus' mini-parable is only a thinly-veiled picture of us having to stand before God for every one of our sins unless we repent now.

**ADULTERY, LUST, AND THE SPIRIT OF MARRIAGE (MATTHEW 5:27-30)**

The Pharisees felt secure in observing the Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20:14), and Jesus states their sentiment: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery'" (5:27). However, Jesus goes beyond the letter to the spirit of the law: "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (5:28).

Is that really what the Law had in mind, you wonder? Yes, indeed. The Tenth Commandment is pretty specific: “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.” (Exodus 20:17).

The Old Testament word translated "covet" has a basic meaning: "desire, delight in." However, it is often used negatively, as here, with the meaning "inordinate, ungoverned selfish desire," sometimes of "lustful desire." The heart of man is the problem according to Jesus. Lust is a thing of the heart. He teaches: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." (Matthew 15:19)

**NATURAL SEXUAL DESIRE VS LUST**

Sex is one of the strongest drives we have. Is this natural sexual desire wrong? No, natural desire for the opposite sex is normal and necessary. Men desire women and vice versa, families are formed, children produced. That is what God intended.

Like any good gift, however, Satan is quick to pervert or twist it into something God didn't intend. Food is good, but it can lead to ill health when eaten in overabundance. Wine is God's good gift, but can cause drunkenness when taken to excess. Money is good, but can corrupt the soul when worshipped. And so on.
The sex drive is a good thing, but only good when it is exercised within the boundaries God has set, namely, marriage. Outside of marriage, sex may "feel so right" but bring a harvest of bad fruit. Inside of marriage it bonds husbands to wives and wives to husbands, and, God willing, children that can grow up within a stable family environment.

**Cutting Off Your Hand, or Worse (5:29-30)**

So what are we to do when we find ourselves lusting after someone? Grasp an eyeball and yank it out of its socket? Is that what Jesus intended? Back in the early years of Christianity, an influential Alexandrian Christian teacher, Origin (187-254 AD), was so plagued by sexual temptations that he castrated himself. Is self-mutilation Jesus' intent?

Jesus, like all of us, sometimes uses hyperbole -- overstatement -- to make a point. When Jesus speaks of a camel going through the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:24), for example, it was hyperbole, an indication of impossibility. When he says a man should hate his father and mother, wife and children (Luke 14:26), he is employing hyperbole.

When Jesus speaks about cutting off a hand or gouging out an eye, he is speaking in hyperbole. If we were intended to take it literally, we should expect to find other examples in the Word as the apostles sought to expound on and teach it. We don't find anything of the sort. The closest is Paul's statement, "I beat my body and make it my slave" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

While Origin's heart may have been right, he misinterpreted Jesus' words. Saints and hermits throughout the ages have discovered that while you can blind yourself or isolate yourself from women, you cannot isolate yourself from your own mind and heart. Jesus' words meant to convey to us that we are to take sexual lust with utmost seriousness. He intended us to understand that lust can lead us down the road to hell itself.

Jesus said: "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28) Therefore, he is saying, unless you and I want to stand as guilty before God as one who commits physical adultery, we must repent rather than excuse ourselves.

**Breaking Free from Lust and Lure**

So if you have been captured by a habit of lust or pornography, how do you break free? It is difficult. If you have practiced a habit over a period of years, you will not break it in a moment. It will take determination and a healthy dose of God's grace to cleanse you when you fail. But it is possible to break free from lust. Here are some steps that can help.

Call an attraction to pornography what it is -- adultery of the heart -- a spiritual addiction. Understand something of the nature of the addiction. For example, what is the "love hunger" that pornography feeds and what are the "triggers" that result in viewing of pornography? Come to a firm conviction that lust is wrong. Deal with each of the rationalizations you have made for your sin. Write them down to look at when you are tempted. Stop feeding your lust. Get rid of anything in your home that triggers this lust. Throw out any pornographic materials you possess. Until you get victory over this it may involve cutting off the internet capability that downloads pornography into your home. Purchase software filters out pornography from your computers -- not just for your children's sake, but for your sake as well.
God wants us to be able to look on members of the opposite sex with love rather than lust. If we are struggling with homosexual lust, he wants us to be able to look on the members of our own sex with a pure love and without lust. This is his plan.

But the war against lust is not essentially a negative one, a defensive battle. If lust and adultery are the negatives, what is the positive? If the law tells us what not to do; what does it direct us to practice? "Teacher," Jesus' enemies asked him to trick him, "which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied:

"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-40) Jesus calls us to look with love.

MARRIAGE & DIVORCE (5:27-32 with 19:1-12)

It is difficult to teach on divorce because it can bring to the surface considerable pain for many people. And when there is pain there is sensitivity, extreme sensitivity to anything that might be construed as judgmental. In this section we're looking at Jesus' brief words on divorce in the Sermon on the Mount.

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery." (5:31-32)

It is difficult to deal with so complex a subject with these two verses alone. Why does Jesus say this? What is behind it? Jesus offers a more extended teaching on divorce in Matthew 19:3-12. How can you fulfil God's intention for marriage? Love, self-giving love. Love is the fulfilling of the Law, Jesus said (Matthew 20:37-40). And love is the only way a marriage can work for a lifetime. Love is the only way to fulfil the law. Jesus said it, and when you think about it, it is self-evident.

The Apostle Paul told husbands, "Love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." (Ephesians 5:25). He went on to expound on the one flesh relationship that Jesus also saw as the root of the marriage relationship. "Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies," Paul teaches. "He who loves his wife loves himself...." Paul goes on to quote Genesis 2:24.

God made marriage to run on the basis of love. Not erotic, romantic love only, but self-giving, self-sacrificing love. Paul compares the agape love of Christ who gave himself up for us to the love that should exist in a marriage. God made law and society and relationships to run on love, too. Yes, there must be a provision for the case of sin -- murder, stealing, hardness of heart. But the essence, the root principle, is love and lifelong unity.

(www.covenanteyes.com). Share with someone close to you your struggle with this sin and become accountable to this person. Ask for this person's prayer support and confess your sins to him (James 5:16). Seek counsel for your problem from a pastor or Christian counsellor. Use the weapons of prayer, scripture reading, and fasting. Accept God's grace and complete forgiveness toward you as his child, even if you fall and sin again.
We need to clearly understand that God's intention is that marriage be enduring. When we enter into marriage, we do so without any escape clause. We do so with faith in God and a firm commitment to love our spouse as our own body. It is a joyous relationship often, but also a self-sacrificing and demanding one. We must teach our children and our brothers and sisters in our churches what God says about marriage.

However, while we honour marriage with all that is in us, we must also recognize man's hardness of heart. We will have in our fellowship people whose marriages have been broken by adultery, by desertion, by selfishness, by unfaithfulness. And we must love them. "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

**THE SPIRIT OF TRUTHFULNESS AND LOVE (MATTHEW 5:33-48)**

Since ancient times, especially in legal situations, people were required to take an oath in the name of their deity, as a way of testifying to their truthfulness. The idea was that if you swear by what you hold holy and are telling a lie, then your deity will surely punish you.

A number of times God swears an oath by his own reputation and holiness. The ceremony we see in Genesis 15:12-21 is an ancient ceremony of "cutting" a covenant and swearing to the other party to keep it. Joseph speaks of the land that God "promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Genesis 50:24). See also Hebrews 4:3 (quoting Psalm 95:11), and Hebrews 6:13, where the writer says, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself." We have a similar custom in our day. When a person gives testimony in court, he is required to promise "under oath" that what he says will be "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

**PHARISEES' PERVERSION OF OATHS**

In order not to use the actual name of Yahweh "in vain," the Jews developed the habit of substituting another word in its place: "LORD," "heaven," etc. But were these substitute words of sufficient holiness to make the oath binding? The Pharisees, the strict religious elite of their day, had made a mockery of oath-taking. They took frivolous oaths, designed to mislead the hearers. Later in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus severely castigates them for how they use an appearance of truth-telling to deceive and mislead (see Matthew 23:16-22).

They had developed a complicated system to determine which oaths were and were not binding. In the Jewish code of law called the Mishnah, there is an entire tractate devoted to the validity of oaths. Jesus tells his followers, "Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King." (5:34-35)

Why? Because there is no difference in holiness between heaven, or earth, or Jerusalem. They are all equally God's, and equally holy. He was calling the Pharisees' intricate system of oaths what it was, a sham. He says, "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No' " (5:37). In other words, don't play games to deceive with your words. Let your words be plainly true themselves.

Jesus attributes attempts to use deceitful speech to the evil one, Satan, who is a liar (John 8:44). When we use language to deceive, we are following the devil, not Jesus. The reason Jesus included this section on oath-taking in the Sermon on the Mount is because learning to speak the truth is essential if we are to be disciples of The Way, The Truth, and The Life. If we would be his followers, we must speak truth like he does.
And love fulfils the law, because love does not deceive but honours another person enough to be honest with them. You'd want to know the truth, no matter how painful. Speak truth to your neighbour in the same way as you'd like to have truth told to you yourself.

This doesn't mean we need to refuse to swear when required to do so in a court or similar situation. Jesus himself didn't. When he was in a mock trial at the high priest's house, he was required to speak under oath (Matthew 26:62-64) and Paul, too, sometimes calls God as his witness (Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Philippians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:5, 10).

The point is not a legalistic one. Jesus' word, "Do not swear at all," is intended as a solemn command to his disciples to speak truthfully without having to resort to any device to prop up their believability. As John Stott says, "If divorce is due to human hard-heartedness, swearing is due to human untruthfulness. Both were permitted by the law; neither was commanded; neither should be necessary." We Christians are called not to oath-taking but to truth-telling. Not just on solemn occasions but every day, in every situation, so that we might reflect Jesus' truthfulness and his love for everyone around us.

**THE SPIRIT OF LOVE VERSUS RETALIATION (5:38-48)**

The second part of the passage we're looking at in this chapter may seem contradictory and impractical on the surface. Jesus begins by stating what the Pharisees were fond of stating: "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'" But I tell you...."(5:38). This is an ancient command, quoting from Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21.

At first glance it seems almost vindictive. If you hurt me, then I have a right to hurt you. If you put my eye out, I have a legal right to put yours out. But to see it this way is surely a misunderstanding of the ancient Near East. Two things we must understand about this famous *lex talonis*, "law of retaliation." First, it was designed to restrain man's vindictiveness, and second it was designed to be administered as the justice of a formal court.

As there was no police in the ancient Near East, the *lex talonis*, simply stated says that you may not extract from someone who has injured you any more than you have lost. In other words, the punishment should fit the crime -- no more, no less. Modern law is based solidly on this sort of principle. Such a law didn't begin with Moses. We find it first in the ancient Code of Hammurabi, a king who ruled in Babylon from 1728 to 1686 BC. The point here was to restrain vindictiveness, not encourage it. Secondly, it is the court that was charged with administering the punishment, not the individual who was injured. As John Stott says: "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."

But the Pharisees of Jesus' time had twisted this law. Apparently they had wrenched it from its judicial context and were applying it to justify their own personal actions. They had similarly misinterpreted Leviticus 19:18, since Jesus restates their interpretation: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'" (Matthew 5:43)

That may have been what the Pharisees said, but it wasn't what the scripture had said (see Leviticus 19:17-18). Apparently, the Pharisees had twisted the scripture to allow themselves just the opposite: to
personally retaliate against their enemies, to seek revenge, to bear a grudge. Until we grasp the Pharisees' twisting of the intent of Scripture, we won't be able to understand Jesus' words. Notice that Jesus' teaching here concerns personal and not judicial action:

"But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." (5:39-42)

Jesus isn't placing his followers outside the protection of justice, but he is calling them to a higher standard. Instead of retaliation and resistance against enemies, he calls them to a radical love. "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (5:44-45). In other words, do good to your enemies, anyone can love friends.

Jesus' point is that in the kingdom of God self-interest doesn't rule, but rather love. He wants us to do more than is required of us by our enemies, by those who are trying to use us, by those who are trying to take advantage of us. Rather than turn on them with resistance and retaliation we are to -- in love for them -- give them more than they require. Love can overcome evil, and we Christians are called to overcome evil in this world by love, our own self-giving love as we are breathed upon by God's Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther put it this way: "Christ is not tampering with the responsibility and authority of the government, but he is teaching individual Christians how to live personally, apart from their official position and authority.... A Christian should not [use violence to] resist evil; but within the limits of his office, a secular person should oppose firmly every evil."
**STUDY 3) MATTHEW 6:1-18 LIVING AS FOLLOWERS: NOTES**

In chapter 6, Jesus turns toward true piety. To understand this, first we need to understand the deep sense of duty towards the poor that infused Judaism. The Law provided that one should not harvest a field completely, but let the corners go unharvested and leave behind enough stalks for the poor to glean after them (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22). Ruth and Naomi, for example, were widows able to survive by this means. Moreover, kindness to the poor was considered a religious duty. (eg Proverbs 14:20-21, Proverbs 14:31, Proverbs 19:17 see especially Matthew 25:42-45).

**SECRET GIVING (6:1-4)**

According to Harvard scholar George Foot Moore, caring for the poor was considered an important duty. If one had it in his power, one should give enough to meet the poor person's actual need. Sometimes to help the poor person save face, the money might be given as a loan, thus Jesus' statement, "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (Matthew 5:42). A person’s first obligation was to support the dependent members of his own family, then to relieve the necessities of his relatives and those in his town.

However, giving alms to the poor was not just personal and direct. By the end of the first century AD, many Jewish communities had organized a community chest to care for the poor. In each town two collectors were appointed to make their rounds of the townspeople each Friday to take up the weekly collection for the poor in money or in goods. Then three others were appointed to give out to the poor every Friday enough to provide for the coming week.

However a given community chooses to care for the poor, the duty to do so is from God. Whether this responsibility is carried on by churches, or charitable institutions, or by the government, or by a combination of these is not dictated by scripture so much as prudence. We all desire to provide for actual need without perpetuating the need for charity to continue forever after.

"So when you give to the needy..." Jesus says. Notice that he took for granted that we would give to the needy. What he was concerned about was the motive and attitude with which the alms were given. Without real love, there would be no reward.

As Jesus begins to discuss expressions of piety in his day, he zeros in on the chief problem with spiritual life: its constant tendency to go to our head and turn into a hollow religiosity. "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." (6:1)

The word translated "Be careful" (NIV), "beware" (NRSV), or "take heed" (KJV) means "to turn toward," specifically in this context, to be in a state of alert, be concerned about, care for, take care. It serves to highlight the command which follows it. The next phrase is, "To be seen by them." How much of our lives are lived to "be seen by them." We stretch to "keep up with the Joneses." We dress to impress and attract and entice. We speak to manipulate and ingratiate and seek our own advancement. We work very hard to create an impression to the outside world. But we are critical of the Pharisees who sometimes did the same thing. So much of our time is spent trying to advance ourselves or impress others. The heart of the problem is the need for love. Pride has a way of waving and gesturing: "Hey, look at me. I need your
We aren't to give to impress others, but for "the audience of One." It matters to God that we don't burn out our spiritual devotion in impressing others. It matters very much to him. He wants us to live in devotion for him alone. He wants us to have a pure heart, a single heart.

God wants us to fill our need for love and acceptance with his own love, flooding me with love and acceptance at the very core of my being. Isn't it interesting that the cure for public pride is secret time with the Father? If we will give to him in secret, he will also give to us in secret an unbounded blessing, so that we are free to give to others without needing to receive praise or even thanks in exchange. And as he cures the root, he also desires to cure the branch. He tells us to love God with all our heart, and love our neighbour as ourselves. Instead of looking within to satisfy our own selves, the cure is to look outward to God and others, and give to them in love.

SECRET PRAYER (6:5-6)
In Jesus' day some religious people, probably of the Pharisee party, took great pride in their devotion, and prayed in public so that people could see how spiritual they were, "to be seen by men." Jesus isn't against public prayer. Jesus himself often prayed in public. But he argues that praying in public in order to be thought by others to be "holy" is offensive. The reward for such self-seeking prayers is merely the applause of men. Any reward from God is forfeit.

We are not just to retire into a private place, but also to close the door, so that we won't be tempted to impress anyone by our piety. Surely God can hear our prayers in crowded places and wide open fields, but to deal with religious pride that was so prevalent in his day (and in ours), Jesus stressed the privacy of prayer. So perhaps Jesus isn't just dealing with pride here. He is offering a practical suggestion about prayer in general. Pray in private for God's benefit as an act of discipleship.

PRAYER IN FEW WORDS (6:7-8)
Unlike Jesus' examples of giving alms (6:2-4) and fasting (6:16-18), Jesus amplifies his teaching on prayer. He says, "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (6:7-8) This raises two questions. First, what kind of babbling is he referring to? The means "speech of tedious length, much speaking, wordiness, long-windedness." Jesus is saying, don't think that eloquence or wordiness are necessary to communicate with God.

Many people feel that if they can't pray that way, they don't know how to pray at all. Perhaps the best comparative example of prayer in the Bible was the Pharisee and the tax collector Luke 18:10-14. The Pharisee prayed 33 words compared to the tax collector's seven. But God heard the shorter prayer because it was offered to Him sincerely rather than out of pride.

One phrase in Jesus' teaching is especially troubling: "... For your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (6:8b). It raises a very important question: Why should we pray at all? If God knows our need before we ask him, then he knows what we will say to him when we pray. So why bother? Why go to the trouble of formulating our prayer into words before God?
Prayer is communicating with God. It is not "thinking good thoughts" as if the positive power of good thoughts is the essence of prayer. Prayer is communicating with God. It is speaking to him. It is formulating our thoughts to him. And, more important yet, it is engaging him in conversation. It is relational. Jesus wants us to learn to communicate with God. And so he teaches his disciples a model prayer, often called "The Lord's Prayer" but should really be named “The Disciple's Prayer” (6:9-15).

The Disciple's Prayer (6:9-15)

In Jesus' day, "father" included the concepts of care, love, responsibility, discipline, hopes and dreams for one's children, respect, authority, and blessing. In the West, fathers have nowhere near the life-long patriarchal authority that fathers have in the Middle East and Far East. Our fatherhood is but a shell of the powerful concept of "father" that Jesus communicated through this intimate word. Something of the Middle Eastern father is depicted in Jesus' parable of the Father and the Prodigal Son to illustrate the loving, searching, longing quality of our Heavenly Father (Luke 15:11-32).

Notice that Jesus teaches us to call out to God as "our Father." Not just a self-focused "my father," but a communal "our Father." The Lord's Prayer is intended to be prayed not only privately, but especially in the community of God's people, the Church.

Jesus then teaches us to pray to God "in heaven," which adds infinity to our understanding of God. Though Solomon built a temple for God, he prayed, "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27) Yes, God is greater than his creation, but "the heavens" is a way to understand the greatness of God's dwelling. And when we reflect on God's greatness, it is easier to have faith to ask of him things that seem difficult to us.

The first petition is "hallowed be your name." The which means "to treat as holy, reverence." Our word "Halloween" is short for "All Hallows Eve," or "All Saints' Eve"). "Hallowed" comes from the English word "holy." Our understanding of "Father" could become sentimental to the point of presuming upon and taking advantage of the Father's graciousness towards us. "Hallowed" reminds us that the Father is holy, set apart from sin. That he can be both the Father of sinners and set apart from sin requires Jesus' atonement to reconcile. When we pray, though we pray with the privilege of intimacy to our "Abba, Daddy," we are never to imagine that we are buddies with God, or his equals. He is always our Father, and he is holy and exalted. Jesus teaches us to call God our Father, recognize his exalted place of dwelling, and to reverence him.

The Near East the idea of "name" stood for the person, his authority, his character, and his activity. When Jesus tells us that the Father's "name" is holy, he means that the Father's whole Person is holy. "Name" can be used as a substitute for a person himself. To paraphrase, "Father, hallowed be your name," means, "Father, may you be treated with the respect and honour that your holiness demands." When we pray, too often we want to get on quickly to our own concerns. But in Jesus' model prayer, we first pray about the concerns of God's Kingdom and his will. This is not the petitioner's prayer so much as the disciple's prayer. This is how disciples are to learn to think and pray and act, with God's Kingdom foremost and predominant in their minds. When we pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done" we are asking God to manifest the power and glory of his kingdom in us, and throughout our world. What a prayer! We are praying that Christ might reign over all. We are also asking the Father to hasten the return
of Jesus Christ to this earth. This petition is also a condition for prayer that all our prayers conform first to God's will. How can we pray the kind of prayer that Jesus wants of us, and still ask for our petty desires, which are so clearly contrary to God's revealed will in the Bible? Teach us to pray, Jesus, we say. Part of that teaching, surely, is to determine God's will and pray along those lines. Prayer for disciples is not to be selfish prayer, but prayer in tune with and guided by God's will.

The fourth petition in this prayer is for our own needs: "Give us this day our daily bread." Bread, of course, is the staple of life. The word is often used for food generally, since bread is the most important food, and is extended here to mean, all of our needs, all those things that we need to sustain us. So, the prayer means something like, "Give us today what we need for today," and fits very well with Jesus' teaching later in the chapter, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (6:34).

Jesus also teaches us to ask God to forgive us "as" we forgive others. In other words, if we forgive others only a little and hold grudges, we are asking God to forgive us only a little and bear a grudge against us. This is a dangerous prayer! How many people pray the Lord's Prayer thoughtlessly, and each time they pray, they pray a curse of unforgiveness down upon themselves.

Jesus is making a point in this prayer, a point which he explains in more detail just after the prayer: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (6:14-15) How could it be plainer? Jesus had just told his disciples not to seek retribution. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (5:44-45). Now he makes it clear that we must forgive, if we are to be considered sons of the Father. Otherwise he will not forgive us.

The sixth petition goes beyond asking for forgiveness; it asks for help in our times of trial and temptation so that we do not sin so as to require forgiveness. On its face it is hard to imagine God leading us into temptation at all. "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." (James 1:13-14) This prayer, "and lead us not into temptation," helps teach us how important it is for us to stop flirting with sin but to actively flee and resist it. That is to be part of the content of our prayers.

This part of the Lord's Prayer reminds us to call upon the Father for strength when we are tempted. We are not to fight a secret war against sin; the Father wants to be our continual partner. He knows our weaknesses. And wants to free us and make us whole. Here we're praying: Don't lead us into places where we can be tempted, but lead us in places where you are, and where we can be free.

This seventh petition is a prayer for deliverance or rescue from the evil one. It is recognition of the spiritual nature of our warfare against sin. There is not just our own temptation, but a tempter. In our own selves, we are no match for him. So we call out to God for rescue, for deliverance, for salvation from our enemy. Together, petitions six and seven are asking God: "Keep us from giving into Satan's temptations."
STUDY 4) MATTHEW 6:19-34 THE DANGERS OF MATERIALISM

In the first part of his teaching in Matthew 6, Jesus talks about true piety towards God: that which seeks its reward in God rather than temporal rewards. It is our purity of heart towards God that he looks at as we worship him. In 6:19-24 he applies this principle of inward purity to the matter of money and storing up treasures (rewards) in heaven.

STORING UP TREASURES (6:19-20)

Storing up itself is not wrong. Israel was an agrarian culture that took in crops in certain seasons and then stored the grain for use during the rest of the year. An examination of the way the Bible refers to "storing" indicates that normally storing up was considered a positive virtue (see Proverbs 21:20, Proverbs 6:6-8). Even the Temple had storerooms where the tithe of the people's produce was stored up to be distributed during the year to the priests and Levites whose families depended upon it (Malachi 3:10). Storing up for later use was wise and prudent.

Jesus is not commanding against this kind of storing. In our culture we save for "a rainy day," for times of unemployment. We save to make purchases, to send our children to school, and for retirement. In Israel the elderly could depend upon living with their grown children and being supported that way. In our culture we can't expect that. Jesus is protesting against the kind of storing up that is a symptom of greed and materialism, of the love of money, and a love of the independence from God that it seems to allow. Money is deceptive. If we were to be rich, we imagine that we wouldn't have to be dependent upon the vicissitudes of poor harvests, or working for a living, or having to ask God for our daily bread.

TREASURES IN HEAVEN (6:20)

So how does one become rich towards God? Just previously, Jesus had taught about doing acts "in secret" so that "your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (6:4b). As examples, Jesus spoke of giving alms to the needy, praying in private, and fasting. These acts of love toward God are ways of storing up treasures in heaven (6:20). There's a saying, "You can't take it with you." No, but you can send it on before you, and you do that by your good works with a pure heart for God alone. Some Christians have so absorbed a "saved by grace, not by works" theology (and so we should), that we downplay the concept of rewards in heaven, such as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 3:8-15, and 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus returns to the spirit and heart as opposed to the exterior. Here he utters a keen observation, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." To find out what we really love, he says, examine the heart, and to see where they heart is, follow the money!

THE WINDOW OF THE SOUL (6:22-23)

The next passage is more difficult to understand. To us Westerners this seems like a mixed metaphor. The eye to us is an organ of seeing. But to the Israelites it also carried something of the idea of a window, a portal through which light or truth would shine into the mind or soul. The "good" eye is the eye that sees truth clearly. The "bad" eye is the eye that is deceived by money and greed and power.
Many people believe they have it all, only to discover upon coming to Christ that the supposed "light" in them is darkness, that they have been deceived and have nothing at all. The love of money has a way of blinding us to God's truth.

A TUG-OF-WAR BETWEEN TWO MASTERS (6:24)
The final verse in this section speaks about the great tug-of-war between the two Masters of our Age (and Jesus’ age): God and Money. The word "Money" is from an Aramaic word which means "wealth, property." "Money" is capitalized, since it seems to be personified in verse 25 in contrast with God.

The struggle between God and Money rests chiefly in what we trust in. (See 1 Timothy 6:8-10, 17 Hebrews 13:5). When people "put their hope in wealth," they automatically lessen their dependence upon God who has promised to never leave us or forsake us. In a way, Money becomes an alternate point of hope and trust, a substitute God. Jesus put it very boldly: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." (6:24) The Apostle Paul was very clear. He calls greed or covetousness what it is: idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

SERVING MONEY
What does it mean to serve Money? The frequency with which you get bombarded with offers of free credit cards is one indication of what a serious problem people have mortgaging their souls by means of plastic. Of one thing you can be sure: banks don't offer you credit cards in the hope that you'll pay them off every month. They want you to charge them up and then pay them the interest each month. If you’re running the rat race of keeping up with payments on debt, aren't you really serving Money? You serve who owns your time. If you're in debt, perhaps Money owns your time.

One of the saddest stories in the gospels is that of the Rich Young Ruler (Luke 18:18-23), who wanted to follow Jesus, but the pull of material things was just too great -- and Jesus’ demands seemed too much for him. Frankly, that's a pretty tough story for rich Westerners to accept. Isn't Jesus just too hard? No. Jesus knows that if a person is that caught up in his own wealth, he can’t be a disciple. He can't serve both God and Money. No way!
Money has the potential to derail our spiritual life disastrously. How we think about and handle our money is not just a personal matter, it is a discipleship matter. That is why Jesus spends time teaching about its twin evils -- the temptation for money to become the:

- Focus of our life, another master, another god (6:19-24), and
- Focus of our worries and cares and thus consume our joy and life direction (6:25-34).

Jesus is speaking about materialism. The dictionary defines materialism as "a theory that physical matter is the only or fundamental reality and that all being and processes and phenomena can be explained as manifestations or results of matter." Also "a preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than spiritual or intellectual things."
ANATOMY OF ANXIETY

This section's passage 6:25-34 examines how worry about money can erode our very faith. Notice in verse 30b, Jesus chides those who worry for their "little faith." Undue worry ought to be viewed as a lack of faith, something to be overcome.

In responding to worry, Jesus gives two illustrations of his Father's care for the disciples, and it centers upon value. First, he points them to the birds: "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (6:26) The birds are under the Father's care. Not one falls to the ground without the Father knowing about it, yet a pair of sparrows could be purchased for a penny in the market (Matthew 10:29). Then he points them to the flowers: "See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these." (6:28-29) In the hot climate of Palestine, the beautiful flowers of spring lose their blossoms and are burned with the grasses for fuel. The point here is that since the Father provides for the least valuable, how much more will he care for the very valuable -- us.

WHAT WORRY CAN'T DO (6:27)

We should have a wise concern for the future and take whatever steps we need to now to provide for ourselves and our families. Farmers have done that for thousands of years, saving seed and planting crops for future harvest. But what Jesus is addressing here is the kind of destructive anxiety that eats into our souls and deprives us of sleep. Anxiety that robs us of our present peace and joy, and propels us into a mythical future where we lack what we need, where we are gripped by fear. Many of our fears and worries never materialize, and our worrying seldom has anything to do with fixing or repairing the future, only fearing it. Jesus recognized the uselessness of worry: "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (6:27)

WORRY IS SIN (6:30-32)

This corrosive worry is thinly disguised unbelief. Jesus says: Worry is a sign of little faith. Faith and anxiety are opposites, and Christians are to open their lives to faith and to reject worry. Worry involves the constant fretting and anxiety that results from thinking about future problems. We Christians are to grow out of that habit. (See Philippians 4:6-7). These two verses spell out the steps to escape worry's death grip. They require disciplining our minds and thoughts:

1. Pray, bring your worries to God. Instead of letting your worries rattle around in your mind, formulate them into prayers and petitions to your Father.
2. Pray with thanksgiving. For what God has done in the past. When we take time to praise God for who he is and what he has done in the past, we are encouraged and strengthened to believe he will do that for us in the future as well. Praise is the language of faith and stirs up faith.
3. Turn your thoughts away from topics of anxiety to those good and noble thoughts that will bring you peace.

SEEKING GOD (6:32-33)

People are always seeking something. So what is it you seek? Pagans or Gentile unbelievers seek after temporal things - food, drink, clothing. What's more, Jesus says, "your heavenly Father knows that you need them." They aren't bad things. But they can preoccupy our "seeking" so we do not have time, energy, or interest to seek the Source of those things, God himself.

27
The difference, then, between the disciple and others is that the disciple seeks God first. He or she gives priority to God first. This is the same issue that Jesus touched on in 6:21 -- "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We seek first what we treasure most. He also touched on it in 6:24 -- "No one can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and Money." We are not to seek our welfare and God with equal intensity. The seeking God must be first and foremost, not relegated to religion or Sunday practice, "... that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18b).

SEEKING GOD'S KINGDOM AND RIGHTEOUSNESS (6:33)
The object of our seeking is to be two-fold, according to Jesus. First, we are to seek God's kingdom or God's reign in our lives and in his world. Some are longing only to leave this earth and get to the peace of heaven. But the disciple is to seek for God's kingdom here on earth, too. Second, we are to seek God's righteousness. Much of Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount compares the Pharisaic understanding of legalistic righteousness with Jesus' heart righteousness which is the spirit of the Law. We are to seek the impossible righteousness that resonates with Jesus' command: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48). This kind of heart righteousness is not the stuff of religious observance alone, nor ritual, or even righteous deeds. It comes from a persistent, insistent, thirsty seeking after God.

Ultimately it is not a self-produced righteousness that we seek. It is a righteousness that he works in us, that is, the personal righteousness that is the fruit of Christ's righteousness imputed to us by faith (Philippians 3:9). For so long we have sought everything else -- food, shelter, advancement. Seek Him first, says Jesus. "Seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (6:33).

Can we take this passage as an excuse not to work for a living? Of course not. Jesus was well aware, I am sure, that birds still had to find and gather their food. In our scientific age we know that flowers must still grow by manufacturing tissue using the elements in the air and the ground by means of photosynthesis. Work is not excluded. The point is that God provides for their needs.
**STUDY 5) MATTHEW 7 JUDGING SELF AND OTHERS:**

**JUDGING OTHERS (7:1-6)**

Probably one of the most misquoted and misused verses in the New Testament is found in verse 1 of our passage: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." (7:1) It is a hard saying. Can it mean what it seems to? If we can't make critical judgments, doesn't our ability to choose between good and evil disappear?

The basic meaning of the word for judge is "to set apart so as to distinguish, separate." Then, by transference, "select" and "pass judgment upon." The word is used in the New Testament to refer to all kinds of judging, and such a broad definition doesn't refine our understanding much.

Notice, too, that the context here is "brothers" (7:3, 5), fellow believers. Jesus is speaking about the kind of judgmental attitude that can spring up among religious people within the religious community. You've seen it: picky, picky, picky. No one is quite good enough to please them. Some men and women act as if they have the spiritual gift of criticism. If you look even more carefully, you see that we are not prohibited from discerning sin or problems in our brother, or even seeking to correct them. But we must first examine ourselves to make sure nothing in us prevents us from seeing clearly. Then, and then only, says Jesus, you can "see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (7:5). Jesus does not require us to suspend our critical faculties. But he is warning us not to be censorious or quick to criticize, since our judgmental attitude may reflect our own sins more than our brothers' sins.

It is hard to believe that Jesus said verses 3-5 with a straight face. The comparison is intended to be funny. Picture a man with a large plank of timber in his eye stooping down to perform minute eye surgery on a man with only a sawdust speck in his eye. Yet that is what we do when we try to correct others without careful self-examination and surrender so that God can cleanse our own lives. Jesus calls those who are quick to correct others without correcting themselves "hypocrites," and enjoins them to take the plank out of their own eye first. Before criticizing someone else we need to humble ourselves before God and repent of our own sins. Then in humility we can serve others in genuine love, rather than genuine pride. Notice, in Matthew 7:5, after they remove the plank from their own eye, then they can see clearly to help their brother. They probably also have a good idea of how painful this surgery is and will be extremely gentle and understanding.

**PIGS AND DOGS (7:6)**

Verse 6 is also difficult to grasp: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces" (7:6).

One of the keys is to understand the view of dogs and pigs in Hebrew culture. Pigs, of course, were considered unclean animals; Jews were forbidden to eat pork of any kind. Only Gentiles raised pigs (Matthew 8:30-34). We think of a dog as "man's best friend," but in Jesus' time they were scavengers around the towns and cities. They might eat the decaying flesh of carcasses in the wild, which would have deeply offended the Jews' understanding of holiness and ritual cleanness. Dogs are looked down on in verses like Proverbs 26:11 and Matthew 15:26-27. The Jews also used the word "dogs" to refer to Gentile outsiders (compare Philippians 3:2 and Revelation 22:15).
So who are the dogs and swine Jesus is referring to? They seem to be people who openly reject the gospel of Christ (see Matthew 10:14; Acts 13:44-45, 50-51; Acts 18:5-6) Jesus is instructing his disciples to discern those who reject the gospel outright, and not to continue to declare it to them so that it is continually slandered and discredited. Rather, go to those who are receptive and hungry for hope.

**ASK, SEEK, KNOCK (7:7-12)**

Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned his disciples against formal, hypocritical prayer, and gave them a model prayer to start them on their prayer journey. Now he takes the lesson a step further by teaching them to ask in faith.

**ASK (7:7-8)**

Ask seems to refer to simple petition, with the promise "it will be given to you." One of the lessons Jesus is teaching us is to ask for the things we desire, rather than just trying to seize them on our own. One thing we eventually learn as children is that for some things the answer is always, "No." We learn not to ask any further. We also learn that in some areas if we ask, and conditions are right, we will receive. As we listen to our parents, we are educated in what to ask for and how to ask. We don't learn these things by never asking. We learn by continuing to ask, and gradually learning our parents' mind, and asking according to what we perceive to be their mind. The Apostle John wrote, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us -- whatever we ask -- we know that we have what we asked of him." (1 John 5:14-15)

**SEEK (7:7-8)**

While "Ask" indicates a petition, "Seek," however, indicates a search for something that is either lost or has not yet been found or discovered. The verb “seek” means "try to find something, seek, look for," with the possible additional sense of "devote serious effort to realize one's desire or objective, strive for, aim (at), try to obtain, desire, wish (for).”

Just previously in the Sermon on the Mount, he had instructed his disciples, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (6:33). It is as if Jesus calls his disciples to a Quest for a kingdom and righteousness that are not immediately obvious. Seeking can be frustrating, but we must not give up. Jesus has told us to seek his kingdom and his righteousness. See also Psalm 34:10, Jeremiah 29:13, Hosea 5:15).

The seeking process is a maturing process, a sifting process, and -- if we continue and don't give up -- becomes a single-minded Quest to know God. "Seek, and you will find." There is a promise here that if we will seek to know the Lord, and seek after his presence and blessing, we will find it. There is a looking that can be frustrating, but we are not to give up because we will find Him if we seek him with all our heart.

**KNOCK (7:7-8)**

The third command is "Knock,3 and the door will be opened to you." Basically, knocking is confined to closed doors, not open ones. In the New Testament, an "open door" seems to denote an "opportunity" (Acts 14:271; Corinthians 16:8-9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3)

Jesus' teaching in verse 7 is in the form of a command. Grammatically, this is known as the Imperative Mood. In Greek, commands can be given in two tenses: Aorist tense commands indicate an immediate and
single action ("Shut the door!"). Present tense commands, on the other hand, carry the idea of continuous and habitual action ("Always shut the door!" or "Keep on shutting the door!"). Each of the commands in verse 7 are in present tense imperative, and therefore stress continued, persistent action. V 7 could almost be translated as: "Keep on asking, and it will be given you; Keep on seeking, and you will find; Keep on knocking, and it will be opened to you."

**THE GOLDEN RULE (7:12)**

The passage concludes with what is often called the Golden Rule: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (7:12) In other words, in light of God's goodness and faithfulness in giving good gifts to his children, so you too are to do good to others.

People have argued that the Golden Rule isn't unique to Jesus. Confucius said, "Do not to others what you would not wish done to yourself." The Stoics had a very similar saying. In the Old Testament Apocrypha we read, "Do not do to anyone what you yourself would hate." Rabbi Hillel in 20 BC said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. This is the whole law; all the rest is only commentary." But notice that each of these is in the negative, somehow limiting or prohibiting certain actions. Jesus' statement is in the positive, guiding and directing all our actions toward others. It is like the command, "Love your neighbor as yourself." It is not a negative limitation but a positive guideline, a high standard indeed.

**THE SMALL GATE AND THE NARROW WAY (7:13-14)**

We are impressed with numbers. Largest, greatest, most. Jesus isn't. We feel that majority opinion rules. Jesus walked his own lonely path. He called Twelve and named them apostles, and from those Twelve the Christian movement was born. At times in history the Christian movement has appeared to hang by a thread. The destination also is startling. One path leads to destruction, the other to life. What does "destruction" mean? The word denotes "the 'destruction' that one experiences, 'annihilation' both complete and in process, 'ruin.' Whenever we see the word in the New Testament it seems to promise a terrible end: The destruction Jesus speaks of is a terrible prospect, a terrible reality.

We are commanded to enter the narrow gate or face destruction. What about our friends? Our relatives? Our associates at work or school? What is their end without Christ? Part of the essential message of Jesus is a clear view to our responsibility: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16; see also Matthew 28:19 and Acts 1:8) This is a hard message, not too popular in our pluralistic culture. But it is Jesus' message.

**WATCH OUT FOR FALSE PROPHETS (7:15-20)**

How can you tell if someone is a false prophet? What do they look like? First, Jesus says that they look like everyone else. They come in "sheep's clothing," that is, they look like other members of the flock. But they're also "prophets," that is, they're active in the church, they're opinion leaders, and vocal. To outward appearances they aren't particularly bad people. But Jesus says that their inward character is as ravenous wolves. They destroy the unity of the flock and pull away the sheep who are at the edges to fulfil their own personal agendas.

So how do you tell them from the other sheep? By their fruit, that is, by their words and deeds. There is no one formula for false prophets, but you'll find bad fruit if you look for it.
BAD FRUIT
Now Jesus shifts analogies from sheep/wolf to good tree/bad tree, good fruit/bad fruit. It is impossible, he says, for a bad tree to bear good fruit. What is a bad tree? It is one whose fruit isn't good for eating. It is in the character of the tree itself, Jesus says: A good tree can be counted on to bear good fruit. A bad tree, no matter how hard it tries to work itself up to good fruit, will still bear fruit after its own character. It may be a beautifully formed tree with wonderful branches and cool shade. But when fruit-tasting time comes, its true nature is revealed. "By their fruit you shall know them," Jesus says. What kind of fruit do you look for? We're not talking about perfection in our leaders. None of us is perfect. We must be gracious towards one another, and bear with each others' weaknesses. But by bad fruit, Jesus is suggesting:

- Strange or somewhat perverted teachings.
- Dominant character flaws.
- Actions and attitudes that don't conform to what you expect of a Christian leader.

False prophets ravage the flock and destroy sheep. Sometimes those false sheep are the pastors themselves. They teach one thing and then live another way. But when their lifestyle is exposed, it devastates the congregation who had been taken in by their hypocrisy.

ACCOUNTABILITY
Congregations can be extremely picky; instead we need to be gracious and loving and forgiving. But we must hold to a higher standard those who aspire to leadership and influence (1 Timothy 3:1ff). Leaders who bear bad fruit, who sin, who fail, must be disciplined. Paul wrote: "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favouritism." (1 Timothy 5:19-21)

Exercising church discipline when it is needed is one of the most important checks and balances we can have to prevent wolves from gaining ascendancy. Laxity about church discipline creates a breeding ground for false prophets.

OBEIDENT FOLLOWERS VERSUS MERE PROFESSORS (7:21-23)
The Greek word for "know," has a number of nuances of meaning. It can mean "to know" at a basic level. It can also mean, "to understand, comprehend," and even be a euphemism for sexual relations. A rarer but important meaning is "to indicate that one does know, 'acknowledge, recognize' as that which one is or claims to be." Thus in our passage it can mean, "I never recognized you (as being my disciple)." See similar uses in John 1:10; 1 Corinthians 8:3; and Galatians 4:9.

Being around spiritual things can be deceptive. We can feel that we are spiritual because we are around the spiritual. We can feel like we are being obedient because we know what is the right thing to do. In the Sermon on the Mount, it wasn't a question of confessing Christ as Lord or of doing good works. The question was one of obedience. Walking the walk, not just talking the talk.

Jesus is not speaking about "salvation by works." Remember his teaching about the tree and its fruit? He is saying that the fruit is the natural expression of the inner character. In the same way our obedience to Jesus is the natural result of an inner trust in him and faith in him -- just as rebelliousness is the result of an inner distrust of Jesus and inherent trust in our own direction-finding techniques.
When James says, "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17), he isn't contradicting Paul's emphasis on salvation as a gift through faith. He is agreeing with it. He is affirming that faith, if it is truly present, will bear fruit in actions. That's the same thing Jesus is saying, "By their fruits you shall know them." This passage is not about offering assurance, Jesus does that elsewhere, but about piercing our own self-deception. And we can only do that by looking squarely at ourselves with the help of the gracious Holy Spirit. The question is whether we are personally obedient to Jesus himself. Do we follow our faith, our church, our religion? Or do we follow Jesus himself?

**THE PARABLE OF THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS (7:24-27)**

The Sermon on the Mount concludes with the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders. It doesn't stand by itself, but is an illustration of Jesus' hard saying about self-deception. The point of the parable is that the wise person not only hears Jesus' words, but also puts them into practice.

In Jesus' day, most buildings were built of stones or mud bricks. In his day and ours, contractors can be sloppy and try to take shortcuts. It's much faster to slap up a house than to build it the right way. But only the right way lasts through the storms.

In the parable, the wise man built his house upon the rock, while the foolish man built his house upon the sand. "The rain came down," Jesus said, "the streams rose, and the winds blew, and beat against that house...." The well-founded house stood, while the house without foundations fell with a great crash.

The big question Jesus is asking is: Which kind of house are you building? Have you sunk your foundations into Jesus, the true Rock? Are you both hearing his words and putting them into practice in your life? If so, when the storms of life come -- and they will -- you will continue to stand. If not, you'll fall apart.