

Kingdom Living

Exploring the Sermon on the Mount



Summer 2025 at Christ Church

Summer Term Notes, April to July 2025

Welcome to our term plan for summer 2025. As a church family we are exploring the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus provides an invitation to live by the standards and values of God's kingdom. When we live as Jesus invites us to, his love and grace naturally overflow from us, bringing encounter and transformation to those we meet and interact with. We become increasingly involved in God's mission, playing our part by helping people find Jesus and follow him wholeheartedly.

As we explore Jesus' words we will hear afresh his call to love God and neighbour (including enemies), and to prioritise eternal values over earthly possessions.

Each week there are a few questions to reflect on and recommendations for applying Jesus' teaching in our lives. This term we've also provided a 'Witness' section which includes some ideas for questions you may be able to ask your family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Try using these conversation prompts as they are, or adapt them to be more relevant to your context. We hope that they will open the door to deeper conversations about the gospel.

Here are some key points to provide context for our journey.

Matthew highlights the parallels between God's Old Testament people and Jesus, God's Son.

In both, a Joseph leads his family into Egypt to escape a threat to life – famine in Genesis, Herod in Matthew.

Pharaoh and Herod both order the death of Jewish baby boys. God delivers the infant Moses and the infant Jesus that they might become deliverers.

Both are tested in the Wilderness – forty years for Israel, forty days for Jesus. The Israelites emerge into their calling through the Red Sea (which Paul sees as a baptism, 1 Corinthians 10:2); Jesus in

the River Jordan, the very river through which Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Joshua and Jesus both mean *to deliver or rescue*.

The highpoint of Exodus is the Giving of the Law (*The Ten Commandments*) on Mount Sinai; and Matthew has this in mind when he writes:

¹ Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them.

Moses, a human, ascends a mountain to receive God's words carved in stone, which remained external to a people who struggled to obey them. Jesus, God's Word made flesh, ascends a mountain to speak his own words, and to fulfil the promise of Ezekiel and Jeremiah that God would one day place his law within his people, giving them new hearts and a new spirit, enabling them to love him and his commandments. The Ten Commandments concern doing (or not doing), whereas the [nine] blessings (or *Beatitudes*) with which the Sermon begins concern being.

The state of being which Jesus describes cannot be achieved by human effort or striving, but only by inviting the Holy Spirit to do his work within us. If you long for these characteristics to become more fully you, the best preparation you can make will be to pray something like this:

Holy Spirit, I thank you that you come to make me more like Jesus. Please use this series on his words to increase his likeness within me? I ask it for his name's sake and for his glory. Amen.

Kingdom Living

The Sermon on the Mount

A manifesto for kingdom living – 1	Week 1	27 th April to 3 rd May	4
A manifesto for kingdom living – 2	Week 2	4 th to 10 th May	5
Treasure in heaven	Week 3	11 th to 17 th May	6
Salt and Light	Week 4	18 th to 24 th May	7
The way that leads to life	Week 5	25 th to 31 st May	8
Effective prayer	Week 6	1 st to 7 th June	9
Heavenly reward	Week 7	8 th to 14 th June	10
Pursue God's kingdom	Week 8	15 th to 21 st June	11
Living in God's kingdom	Week 9	22 nd to 28 th June	12
Living generously	Week 10	29 th June to 5 th July	13
One standard	Week 11	6 th to 12 nd July	14
Strong foundations	Week 12	13 th to 19 th July	15

The Shape of Small Community Evenings

Welcome, Worship, Word and Witness		16
------------------------------------	--	----

A manifesto for kingdom living – part 1

Read: Matthew 5:1 – 12

It's been said that *The Sermon on the Mount* (the teaching given by Jesus in Matthew 5 – 7) is one of the most loved passages in the Bible ... and yet also one of the least obeyed.

The two anchor points for these three chapters are *The Lord's Prayer* (6:9-15) and *The Beatitudes* (5:1-12), so called because the Greek word for blessing used by Matthew, *makarioi*, which opens each verse from 3 – 11, is rendered *beatus* in Latin.

Let's note, firstly, that these words – some of the most famous ever spoken – were addressed to those who followed Jesus (5:2).

People often praise these words of Jesus and say how much better the world would be if people did what he said. But if we hear Jesus simply telling people to behave properly, we're missing the point. Jesus is not saying, *try as hard as you can to live like this*; but rather that those who are already like this most fully reflect the reality of God's Kingdom. In other words, Jesus is issuing not so much a command to *reform* as an invitation to *become* ...

Sometimes, victims of serious illness or injury need to relearn how to do things they previously took for granted, such as learning to use their non-dominant hand to write or brush their teeth. The amazing thing is that our brains can be rewired to allow us to do so. On a more mundane level, the same thing happens when you change your car, and have to learn that the lever for the windscreen wipers is where the one for the headlights used to be. After a few weeks of inadvertently flashing your headlights to ward off rain, the new default settings become second nature.

What does it mean to move from a mindset of "I'm being told to behave like ..." to "I'm being invited to become like ..."?

What aspects of your understanding of the call to follow Jesus do you need to re-learn, and in what way(s)?

How can Romans 12:1-3 help in this re-wiring?

There's something about relearning in these few, short verses. Many people see a desirable life as consisting of things like success, wealth, health, long life, winning ... We have a great deal to learn from Jesus' words, so let's pray for the rewiring work of his Holy Spirit, that we may be transformed by the renewing of our minds.



Application:

What challenges are you facing in this season?

Perhaps you already have someone who is walking alongside you in prayer in the current season. If you don't, how about asking someone? Then arrange to meet with them regularly to pray together.

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus, "What challenges are you facing at the moment and if you were able to speak with the God who created everything, what help would you ask him for?"

Be ready to share something about how Jesus has helped you. Offer to pray for them.

A manifesto for kingdom living – part 2

Read: Matthew 5:1 – 12

What draws God's compassion, his favour, his blessing? The Beatitudes offers some intriguing answers. If The Ten Commandments are prescriptive, a list of commands people are called to obey; The Beatitudes are descriptive, a list of characteristics God's Spirit enables his people to display, that we may become more like Jesus.

Are there times when you imagine that you've somehow earned or merited God's favour?

Is it hard to acknowledge that God's favour is pure gift? That nothing you can do – and nothing you have done – can earn God's favour or disqualify you from it?

In what ways is the Holy Spirit asking you to be poor in spirit?

The first blessing sets the tone:

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

The root word for 'poor' here means 'to crouch and cower' and was the standard term for a beggar, someone truly destitute. There's a helplessness about such a person, dependent on others' charity, the polar opposite of rich.

Jesus links the word with 'spirit,' which in the New Testament signifies the capacity (unique to humans among all the creatures of earth) to experience personal relationship with God.

Jesus is telling us that God's favour, his blessing, is drawn to those who acknowledge that their hands are empty of anything that might earn or merit his favour. The kingdom of heaven cannot be bought, bartered, infiltrated or taken by stealth or force. It must be received as pure gift. We often find it hard to acknowledge our own helplessness. But acknowledge it we must if we are to enter the Kingdom of God.

Nothing that I have or haven't done in the past, nothing I can or cannot do now, nor yet anything I might or might not do in the future, can mend my brokenness, overcome what separates me from God, and push open heaven's doors. The wonder of the gospel is that Jesus has done all this for me. He lived the perfect life I cannot live. He died the death that should have been mine. All I need do is approach his cross with empty hands and longing heart. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And in God's kingdom, beggars find that they are empty-handed no more.

God loves those who realise they have nothing to offer him, but simply rely on his mercy. It makes them a perfect fit for his Kingdom. (Who? © Bible Society)

Application

In what aspects of your character would you like to grow?

Identify one thing you can do to help you grow in the character traits described in the Beatitudes. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you do that one thing. Repeat ...

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus, "if you could change one thing about your character what would it be?"

Be ready to share something about how Jesus has transformed you. Offer to pray for them.

Treasure in heaven

Read: Matthew 6:19 – 24

We live in a society that places a high value on earthly treasure. The brands we support, items we purchase and lifestyle we live all say something about us. When we connect our self-worth to earthly things we set ourselves up for disappointment and disillusionment. Earthly things come and go, they change and they fail. They provide an unstable and weak foundation for our lives. We can do the same towards others; forming judgments about others based on earthly things. This can lead to disconnection and isolation from others.

How do we keep our eyes healthy?

In what ways might we think of possessions and money as treasure?

In what ways can we store treasure in heaven?

Jesus teaches us to keep these things in perspective by prioritising the values of God's kingdom. The image of treasure is challenging because it captures the pull that money and possessions can have on us. Jesus is encouraging us to pay attention to our inner motivation. He is not calling us to a specific formula or an overly ascetic lifestyle. Rather, he is getting us to think about what we are treating with greater

value than the kingdom of heaven. That could be our income or savings, it could be specific items we own, or the types of holidays we take. We need to be careful here to not make value judgments about others. The things one person thinks of as treasure may not be treasure to someone else.

So how do we identify where our treasure is? If God asked you to sell something, or to change your job, or change your lifestyle, would you? Are there boundaries, no-go areas? Things that you hope God will not ask you to give up? Be specific. What if God asked you to give more of your income away? Or to take a less expensive holiday and give away the money you have saved?

What-ifs only get us so far. To be confident of the specific actions we should take, we have to first listen attentively to the Holy Spirit and understand what God is actually asking of us. Only then can we act with the confidence that we are outworking God's will in our lives.

This is what Jesus is getting at when he states "No one can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve both God and money" (Verse 24). If money is our master then it will be hard to be obedient to God's call when he asks us to give away what we have. Conversely, if God is our master then we will be obedient to his call whatever the cost. When we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus in this way, 'our whole body will be full of light' (Verse 22). We store treasure in heaven when we put Jesus first and live our lives in obedient response to the Holy Spirit.

Application:

Where is your treasure?

Identify a new way you can invest in another person or people. Work out the specific actions you need to take to do this, then plan and do those actions.

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus,
"how do you help yourself to feel secure in this life?"

Salt and Light

Read: Matthew 5:13 – 16

Again, we remember that these words are addressed to those who follow Jesus, designed to challenge and inspire we who read them today as they did their first hearers.

Jesus uses two vivid images – salt and light – to describe the call and mission of those who follow him ... and each is accompanied by a warning.

We can't read these words and think that following Jesus can be something private. He's designed and now calls us to be *the salt of the earth*. Salt's main use in the ancient world was to preserve, to prevent things going off, becoming rancid, spoilt.

It's an arresting image to use of those who follow Jesus. If you're looking for purpose in life, how does stopping life on planet earth going bad sound?

Secondly, Jesus calls those who follow him *the light of the world*. This time, he uses an even less ambiguous word to indicate the scope of our mission – *kosmos*. We're designed and called to illuminate this world for our fellow human beings, shining light into darkness, so that people can find their way out by following *him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light* (1 Peter 2:9).

This is why we answer the question, *Why does Christ Church exist?* with, *For the heavenly transformation of people and culture in Bristol*.

The properties and benefits of both salt and light are self-evident; but Jesus warns that as *spiritual* realities, both can lose their impact. It's actually very difficult for salt to lose its saltiness – the only way is by dilution. Jesus is warning us not to allow our faith to be diluted, not to mix Truth with other ideologies.

Light can only become ineffective if it's deliberately hidden. Does fear, or embarrassment or something else make you hide what Jesus has given you for others? One thing above all else wins people for Christ, and that is the lives of those already won to him.

Followers of Jesus are called to stick out rather than blend in, to make a difference rather than be indistinguishable from those around us.

In what ways is Jesus calling you to work for the heavenly transformation of people and culture in Bristol?

What does it look like to be salt and light in your contexts – family, friends, neighbours, colleagues ...?

What inhibits you from sticking out as a Christian and tempts you to just blend in?

Application:

What part do you play?

Identify the part you play in the Christ Church family and how you can be involved in the vision. How is the Holy Spirit prompting you to play your part in the heavenly transformation of culture and people? How is he asking you to improve the flavour of the world around you? In what dark places is he asking you to shine the light of Jesus?

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus, "where do you find connection with a community?"

Be ready to share something about what it's like to be part of your church family.

The way that leads to life

Read: Matthew 7:13 – 23

What do Jeremiah 21:8, Psalm 1:6, and Proverbs 14:12, say about the two ways and choices we must make?

What sort of fruit would help you distinguish between prophets? What character would you look for?

How easy is it to be nominal Christian or just swept up in church life?

Do you remember learning the warning signs to pass your Driving Theory test? They are signs which warn you of oncoming danger. Jesus gives us three strong warnings here, choose right not wrong path, v13-14, heed the true not false prophets, v15-20, be a true not false disciple, v21-23.

Imagine the old city stone walls of Jerusalem, some gates were wide enough for lots of people and animals, some were really narrow, allowing

only one person at a time. We all have a choice, which gate to go through, and which path to follow in life. The narrow gate, leading to eternal life is only entered through Jesus alone. (John 14:6) The OT talks about two ways, Jeremiah 21:8, *'This is what the Lord says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death.* Psalm 1:6, Proverbs 14:12.

We each have to make that choice individually, which way to go?

The second warning is to be discriminating, some prophets are false, don't be naïve. Think of the wolf disguised as a loving grandmother in Little Red Riding Hood! How can you tell if a prophet is false? Look for fruits in their life, look at their deeds not just their words, character really matters. Trees cut down and burnt, verse 19 is a sign of future judgment.

Finally a warning that not all so called disciples will enter heaven, verse 22, on that day, judgment day, there will be division between true and false disciples. Beware being a Christian in name only. Beware those who fake miracles and prophecies, people can be deceived and deceive others. The test is do we know Jesus personally? It doesn't matter if we were brought up in a Christian home, each one of us stands alone at judgment day, do we know the Lord personally? People can sing Lord, Lord as much as they want but still not do the will of God.

As we tread that narrow path through life, who can help us keep going and support us from deceivers? Our life choices are crucial.



Application:

Who are you walking alongside on the journey?

Identify someone in the church family you can connect with and potentially walk alongside. Meet with that person.

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus, "where do you find support in life?"

Be ready to share something about the support you get from Jesus and from other followers of Jesus who walk alongside you.

Effective prayer

Read: Matthew 7:7 – 12

Jesus gives us this amazing promise about prayer, ask, seek, knock. It sounds so easy, yet why do we still find prayer difficult? Why are we so reluctant to ask? The words are in the continuous tense, keep on asking, seeking, knocking.

In Tom Wright's book on Mark, he questions whether we are too reluctant to ask for things especially for ourselves? It is so much easier to pray for others than for our own desires. Of course, we need to be mindful of asking humbly according to God's will, and in his name. Sometimes it is easy to forget God is like a loving father who longs to give presents to his children, just ask him! Sometimes when certain prayers seem unanswered it is possible to pray less frequently, to stop bringing our needs before him, just keep on asking. A child desperate for a toy will keep going back to his/her parent until it is given or promised that toy for a birthday present. God is a good Father, and we can and should ask Him for what we need.

In Uganda Christians will pray passionately for their basic needs, asking God for food, for a safe journey, for their needs to be met. Their total dependence on God is truly inspiring.

Ask – coming in humility, conscious of our need but voicing that prayer request.

Seek- pursue the will of God, seeking wisdom

Knock – Persevering and persisting in prayer
(see Luke 18:1 – 8, persistent widow)

The bread/stone or fish/snake analogies simply mean if you ask for something beneficial you won't get something useless or dangerous, a loving parent knows what their children need.

Have you become reluctant to simply ask God for things for yourself?

Has seemingly unanswered prayer, affected your prayer life?

Do you expect answers?

How would you like people to treat you?

Archbishop William Temple said, *When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't, they don't.*

The passage ends at verse 12, with a summary of Jesus teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. It is often called the Golden Rule, do to others what you would have them do to you. It is often quoted in negative way (don't do to others..) but Jesus phrases it positively. How would you like people to treat you? Do likewise.

Application:

With whom and how do you pray?

Meet with two or more people this week to pray. When you meet, first listen to the Holy Spirit then pray in response to what you hear.

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus, "have you ever prayed?" If they respond positively, ask them "what was it like?"

Be ready to share something about how you pray and how the Holy Spirit helps you pray.

Heavenly reward

Read: Matthew 6:5 – 18

A common thread through the Sermon on the Mount is that the attitude of our heart matters. Even with something as essential as prayer, it's possible for us to have good or poor motives.

In verse 5, Jesus is not prohibiting standing to pray or praying aloud. Rather, he is highlighting the fallacy of desiring to be noticed in our praying. In verse 6 he helps us to understand that prayer

brings us into conversation with the Father and that the Father's attention is the only attention we need. Jesus then provides instruction to his followers about how to pray (verses 7 – 15). Using many words is not helpful as God already knows what we need. We need to be quiet in order to listen to the Holy Spirit.

Jesus instructs us to begin prayer in worship of our heavenly Father and by putting first the kingdom of God. It is God's kingdom and God's will that we pray will come on earth as in heaven. Only when we have declared that as our first priority do we seek God's provision for our daily lives. God is the focus of our prayer as he forgives us our sin as we have forgiven those who sin against us, leads us away from temptation and delivers us from the evil one.

Jesus then turns to fasting. Again we find that it is our heart-attitude that is most important. When we fast, it is not to be obvious to others. We are not to parade the fact that we are fasting, and if we do then we will have received our reward. The right heart-attitude is to recognise that our heavenly Father 'who sees what is done in secret, will reward us' (Verse 18).

We can see from Jesus' teaching that prayer is about meeting God on his terms not ours. It is about prioritising his will over ours. It is about seeking his affirmation alone. When we declare in our words and actions that God's heavenly reward is all we seek, we challenge the culture in which we live. We speak about God's kingdom, into a culture obsessed with curated social image, likes on social media, and popularity. In God's kingdom all are valued equally and all are invited to follow Jesus and enjoy relationship with the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this way, God's kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.



Application:

In what ways are you seeking a heavenly reward rather than an earthly one?

Invest significant time in prayer and/or fasting this week.

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus, "where do you receive affirmation?" If they respond positively, ask them "what is it like to receive that affirmation?"

Be ready to share something about how it feels for you to receive affirmation from your heavenly father.

Where do you look for affirmation from?

Why might heavenly reward seem insufficient such that people look for earthly reward?

How can we meet God on his terms and not our own?

Pursuing God's kingdom

Read: Matthew 6:25 – 34

Worry and fear seem to shape the world we live in. As I write this, the headlines on a major news website include the phrases 'largest humanitarian crisis', 'devastating toll', 'deadly floods', 'confidence at lowest levels', 'fresh concerns'. How are we to react to all this worry and fear? We may know people who are overwhelmed with it all. Perhaps we find ourselves feeling the same way?

What things are causing you worry or concern?

How do you seek God's wisdom and guidance whilst also applying yourself to the necessary work, planning and forethought?

Jesus tells his followers 'do not worry about your life.' He speaks to them about the basic essentials of life – water, food, clothing – through the images of God feeding the birds and adorning the flowers of the field with splendour. Jesus is not saying that work, planning, and forethought are unnecessary. Rather, he is instructing his followers that anxious concern regarding physical needs is overcome through trust in the Lord.

How do we trust God for our needs without settling into a passive state of waiting for God to provide? Jesus is emphatic in his invitation for his followers to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." The word 'seek' can be translated as 'pursue' or 'strive'. It is an active verb that requires work, planning, and forethought. God reveals his kingdom to us by his Spirit and through his word. Therefore, to pursue God's kingdom we need to listen attentively to the Holy Spirit as we read God's word and engage with the world around us. In conversation with the Holy Spirit we ask God to help us understand what is happening in the world and how he is asking us to respond and be involved. The Holy Spirit helps us understand where God's kingdom is welcomed and where it is being opposed. This understanding helps us pray in accord with the work of the Spirit.

Understanding God's will for us is the first part of our work, the second is obedient action. In the power of his Spirit we do what he asks of us and thereby play our part in establishing his kingdom on earth as in heaven. Jesus completes this part of his teaching by encouraging his followers to concentrate on the present. What is the Spirit asking of us now? God will lead us through tomorrow when it comes, we have no need of worrying about it before it comes.

Application:

In what ways are you being active in trusting Jesus?

Share with a friend something you are finding it challenging to trust God for. Pray together and commit to trusting this to God.

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus,
"have you ever placed complete trust in another person?"

Be ready to share something about how it feels for you to completely trust Jesus with your life.

Living in God's kingdom

Read: Matthew 5:17 – 37

The Pharisees (their name means separatists) were sincere Jews who longed to see national revival, and did everything humanly possible to bring their nation back to God. And therein lay the problem – everything humanly possible ... their mistake (it's one we can still make today) was the assumption that fallen human beings can fulfil God's call to holy living through their own efforts.

Jesus emphasised what the Old Testament had always made clear: human beings cannot be sanctified through the outside-in of religious practice, but only through the inside-out power of the Holy Spirit. The Sermon on the Mount is about what is divinely possible.

When Jesus endorses the Law of Moses, and claims that every last word must be followed to the letter, his listeners may have been tempted to conclude, In that case, what hope is there for me? But Jesus states that he will fulfil the law and accomplish what it demands (v. 17).

The Pharisees taught that Temple sacrifice, endlessly repeated, wiped the slate clean so that people could try even harder next time. Jesus' once for all, perfect sacrifice of himself on the cross, will set people free not only from the guilt ... but the power of sin.

Jesus offers hope of breaking the cycles and spirals of sin – murder, adultery, divorce, trustworthiness, retaliation and our attitude to enemies. As his Spirit releases within us the power to live out what God truly commands, the Kingdom grows.

Murder and infidelity grab headlines, but stem from anger & hatred, lust & fantasy – the problem is with our thoughts long before our actions. We're to work for reconciliation and peace with our adversaries.

His dramatically exaggerated talk of lopping off or gouging out body parts leaves us in no doubt that securing eternal life in the kingdom of heaven is worth any price.

Jesus' teaching on divorce sounds harsh to the modern ear, but its target is a society where men held all the power and women almost none.

Jesus calls us to be people of our word, with no need to persuade others of our integrity through exaggerated claims.

How much of what you do for Jesus is in your own strength, and how much in response to the prompting of his Spirit?

Are you ever tempted to think, I can't be so bad – I've never done THAT ...? Allow Jesus' words about anger and lust to sink in and lead you to repentance.

Do you know yourself to be truly set free from guilt and shame by the 'once for all' sacrifice Jesus made for you on the cross?

Application:

What do you find most exciting about living in God's kingdom?

Share with a friend an area of your life in which you would like to live more intentionally in God's kingdom.

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus, "what's the most exciting thing in your life right now?"

Be ready to share something about living in God's kingdom that is exciting to you.

Living generously

Read: Matthew 5:38 – 48

Far from abandoning The Law and The Prophets, Jesus will fully realise them, his Spirit renewing hearts and minds, making it possible for everyone who follows him to make God's covenant a daily reality in their own lives through the work of his Spirit deep within us.

Revolutionary? Yes – but in complete harmony with Old Testament prophecy. Jesus is THE light of the world, crucified on a hill-top for the whole world to see, offering salvation to all.

Astonishing as it may sound, the Old Testament law on revenge (an eye for an eye) was a limiting edict in a world of savagely spiralling revenge and honour killings. But Jesus goes further, calling those who follow him to show outrageous generosity to those who abuse them. Then as now, occupying armies visit casual violence on the conquered – Roman troops were infamous for seizing Jews' clothing or force them to carry their military packs over long distances.

Read Ezekiel 36:26-27. In what ways is the Spirit of Jesus renewing your heart and mind? How does that show itself day by day?

Are you able to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you? Ask the Spirit of Jesus to give you the grace to do this ...

Ironically, the Law of Moses also limited God's demand to love to fellow Israelites (that this is how neighbour was understood is indicated by the question Who is my neighbour? which prompted the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10). Enemies deserved enmity.

But Jesus now extends the idea of sacrificial love – which he will perfectly display on the cross – to its logical conclusion. His call to love our enemies is one of the most radical and counter-intuitive teachings ever given.

If we're to be like God, who loves righteous and wicked alike, we must do the same. Our generosity must mimic his. If we reserve our love for those like us, we're no different from anyone else. In Romans 5:8 Paul reminds us that we were all God's enemies once; yet he showed us not enmity but extraordinary generosity – while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The call to mirror God's perfection should inspire rather than discourage us: aiming for an impossibly lofty target raises our game each time we try. Many Christians have found that praying for those who persecute them is transformational. We may never become sinless in this life – but through the Holy Spirit, we can all sin less ...

Application:

How can you bless a neighbour and how can you bless an enemy?

Is there someone who is against you or with whom there is a break-down in relationship?

Pray for that person, and ask the Holy Spirit to show you a way you can bless them, then do it.

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus, "what would it feel like for you to receive a friend's gratitude and encouragement?"

Be ready to share something about a time when you have prayed for God's favour to be shown to someone. Offer to pray for them in this way.

One Standard

Read: Matthew 7:1 – 6

Jesus now tackles temptations we face towards others; it is so easy to be critical of others and to judge them. Jesus is clear, you will be judged yourself by the same standard you use to judge others. You may be familiar with Shakespeare's play, Measure for Measure, where Angelo becomes Lord of Vienna and judges other but in the end, he himself discovers justice and mercy, the play is based on Matt 7:2.

Jesus is not forbidding Christians becoming magistrates or judges but is warning us that we will be judged by the same standards we use towards others. Remember Jesus was son of Joseph, a carpenter, so Jesus is using hyperbole. He takes woodworking images, a speck of wood versus a whole plank or log in your eye. We are not to condemn others, or be hypercritical, rather take a long hard look at ourselves first. See the parable Matt 18:23 – 35, the unforgiving servant, where the forgiven debtor shows no mercy to another servant. God has shown us mercy, be merciful to others.

It is not wrong to have high standards, just don't look down on moral failings of others, or be tempted to play God. Jesus' words were particularly directed at the scribes and Pharisees who loved finding faults in others. A hypocrite originally meant an actor with a mask, do we pretend to be something we are not? Are we blind to our own failings?

See verse 6, the passage ends instructing us to have a right discrimination in spiritual matters, dogs and pigs stood for non-Jews, at first Jesus message was for Jews, but later it spread to all Gentiles, the whole world. Be careful, about timewasters, or those who adamantly refuse to hear the truth, don't throw pearls before swine, move on to others.

What people or behaviours brings out your judgmental side?

How can we have a right estimation of ourselves? Give suggestions how to go about it.

Where do I need to show mercy?
Where do I need to move on?

Application:

Whom have you judged recently and by what standard?
Do you hold yourself to the same standard?

Think of people you may have judged or be tempted to judge, and pray God's blessing over them. Do this on your own and with a few other people.

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus,
"how do you choose the standard you live by?"

Be ready to share something about the freedom of not having to choose the best standard to live by because God provides you with the standard to live by."

Strong Foundations

Read: Matthew 7:24 – 29

Remember singing with actions?

*The rains came down and the floods went up
and the house on the rock stood firm.*

There is such an important truth here, not just a children's action song, build your foundations firmly, deeply, on Jesus, hear but also put his words into practice, then your life will survive

whatever storms come along. In Israel, the summers are dry but when the autumn rains come there are torrents and dry wadis fill with water, sweeping away any loose buildings. If you want your building to survive, you need deep foundations on solid rock. Both houses can look the same superficially but only one survives the floods. Paul warns us too, 1 Cor 3:11 *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

Jesus is our cornerstone, Eph 2:20 – 21, *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.*

The foundation is built on by those who obey Jesus words. It is easy to hear his words, but Jesus wants us (verse 26) to put them into practice. It is foolish to know the right thing to do but then not to do it, like building on sand which is easily washed away in a flood.

Building on rock, is an image of something fixed, eternal which doesn't shift according to prevailing cultural or religious fashions. The truths of God stand firm through time.

2 Tim 2:19 *Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."*

Jesus lays great emphasis on doing not just hearing his words. This finishes the first of five solid blocks of Jesus' teaching in Matthew. The Sermon on the Mount ends v28-29, with a reminder the crowds were amazed at his teaching BUT that didn't mean they were necessarily committed to building their lives on Jesus.

Application:

How are your foundations?

Discuss your life foundations with a trusted friend. Are there areas that need to be strengthened? Pray together asking God to help you establish stronger foundations.

Witness: Ask someone who doesn't know Jesus, "how do you cope with the storms of life?"

Be ready to share personal testimony of how you trust Jesus through the storms of life. Offer to pray for them.

When you have experienced storms in your life, what has been your bedrock?

Why does Jesus repeat "and puts them into practice" v24,26 -isn't hearing his words enough?

The rock stands firm, what shifts in culture can cause us to wobble and need shoring up?

Welcome, Worship, Word and Witness

Introducing the “4W’s” – a tool for your Small Community

The 4W’s is a simple structure of welcome, worship, word and witness which you can use as a Small Community.

The 4W’s:

- Provide a simple structure for your Small Community evening
- Shorten the amount of preparation time that you as Small Community leader need to put into each evening
- Enable more people to participate in leading a smaller part of the evening
- Enable people to express their creativity as they lead
- Help to develop leadership skills in your Small Community members
- Helps to embed our church values of encounter, family, generosity and transformation into your Small Community

How it works?

- Each Small Community evening is divided into 4 parts
- A different member of the Small Community leads each part
- Each part is simple to lead, and so requires minimal preparation
- The sections are not prescriptive so as different people lead them it is likely that no two evenings will look the same

What are The 4W’s?

1. **Welcome** – getting to know each other and getting everyone involved (15-20mins)
2. **Worship** – moving the focus away from us and on to God (15-20mins)
3. **Word** - practically applying the Bible passage / Sunday teaching to people’s lives (40 mins)
4. **Witness** - supporting one another to live out our Christian lives in the world (20 mins)

Welcome

- The idea behind this is to simply get everyone involved at the beginning of your time together.
- This can take a number of forms but is often a simple exercise or each person answering a fun question in turn.
- The question should be relevant to the stage of your group (eg – getting to know a new group, or going deeper for a group that has been together for a while).
- The question could connect with the theme or the passage that you will be looking at later.

Welcome, Worship, Word and Witness

Worship

- The aim of this section is to connect us with God, moving our focus off ourselves, where it has been for the welcome, and onto the Lord.
- Worship can take many forms including singing (live if you have musicians or singing along to a song on Spotify), listening to a piece of music, reading a psalm together, using objects or pictures, or sharing bread and wine together.
- You will find lots of creativity within your group – the key is to keep it simple and enable people to participate together.

Word

- Leading a Bible Study can feel like an overwhelming task that needs expert biblical knowledge, a degree in theology and skills at group interaction.
- The Word section is not a Bible Study! You are not teaching the group, regurgitating the sermon or sharing your expertise (or lack of it!).
- You are simply helping people apply the message of scripture (or the theme of the Sunday teaching) to their lives.
- This can be done in three stages:
 - Stage 1 – What is God saying?
 - Review the message / passage from Sunday
 - Ask – What was the main point of the passage / teaching? What stands out to you?
 - Stage 2 – Connecting with your experience
 - Share – share stories that illustrate what you are learning from your own lives
 - Stage 3 – Ministry time
 - What is God saying to us right now? Who needs help? Pray into this.
- Our CC Small Community notes (on our website) are structured to allow you to do this easily with questions (in yellow box) and application (in the blue box).

Witness

- Each of us has a frontline – a place where we connect with the world around us. This may be our workplace, the school gates, clubs that we belong to, family connections etc.
- It is often surprising how little we know about each other and these other areas of our lives.
- The last part of the 4W's aims to connect what we are learning with the life we are living.
- There are lots of different ways to do this, but one way may be to ask someone in your group to share responses to the following questions then to pray for them.
 - Presence: How or where do you sense God's presence?
 - Pressure: Where are you feeling pressured?
 - Purpose: What do you feel is your purpose?
- As with the other sections of the 4W's, you can be as creative as you like. The key point is to keep this section outward looking.