



Lent Devotional Plan

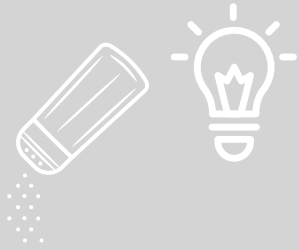
Adapted from Deron Spoo's
"The **Good** Book"

For Families

You will find a family specific devotional at the end of each booklet. Please choose whatever day and time to do them with your family (*over a meal, before they sleep, etc.*).



There is no specific day that each devotional corresponds with. **All devotionals have been tailored to be relevant for your children.**



week five

Matthew 5 1

Matthew 6

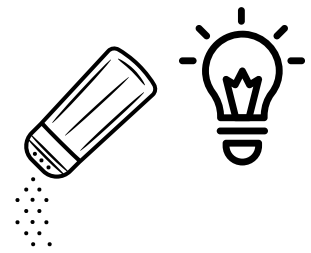
Matthew 7

Luke 8

John 3

Luke 15

23 | What Does Jesus Want?



"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world." Matthew 5:13-14

Matthew 5:3-12 contains a series of short sayings called the Beatitudes. To Jesus, attitude is important. Psychologists speak of a person's explanatory style. Good and bad happen to us all. A positive or negative attitude originates from how we explain these circumstances to ourselves. Jesus holds in front of us the perpetual truth that even when life is unfair, God is still good. That should become our explanatory style as well.

In addition to attitude, Jesus spoke about identity in Matthew 5:13-16. Two pictures in particular capture the character of a Jesus follower.

1. "You are the salt of the earth" (v. 13). In Jesus' culture, salt was a symbol of wisdom. In fact, the phrase "lose its taste" is a single Greek word: *morante*. This is a word that ultimately found its way into English as the word *moron*. Jesus commands his followers to reflect wisdom to the whole world. More dangerous than thinking the wrong thoughts is the refusal to think at all. "Engage your mind!" commands Christ. We're exhorted to live wisely and reject the moronic norm.
1. "You are the light of the world" (v. 14). In this second picture, Jesus mentioned two lights of varying intensities, the light of a simple candle that illuminates a single room. Why mention these followers are to shine with the same integrity, each follower shines with a different intensity. Stay-at-home parents may shed light only on the few lives under their care, while those with a public platform may influence thousands. Whether public or private, each of us is called to live a life that reflects the brightness of God, making integrity our primary concern and leaving it to God to determine the level of intensity.

In the final paragraphs of Matthew 5, Jesus repeated a phrase several times: "You have heard that it was said...But I tell you." With each repetition, Jesus cited a familiar commandment from the Older Testament and then exposed the heart attitude from which these evil things originate. Perhaps Jesus is teaching us that character doesn't originate from outer appearances or actions from inner decisions and devotion.

Reflection

What is your greatest weakness as a follower of Jesus? As you consider this question, you may want to look through the list of sins Jesus mentioned in Matthew 5, asking God to show you how you've failed. But don't limit yourself to confessing your sins and asking for forgiveness. Consider your greatest strengths as well. Take a few moments to thank God for how he has gifted you.

adapted from Deron Spoo's "The Good Book"

24 | Why Worry Never Works



"Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:34

As important as it is to integrate good habits into our character, it's equally important to avoid habits that may prove destructive. The final section of Matthew 6 is Jesus's full-frontal assault on the damaging habit of worry. The word worry is used seven times throughout Matthew, six of which appear in the latter part of this chapter.

The New Testament word for worry reveals why the condition is so damaging. The Greek term *merimnate* could also be translated "don't go to pieces." Worry can fracture our hearts and minds, and it may even ultimately break our trust in God. Worry distracts us from our greatest focus: becoming like Jesus himself. Following Jesus is difficult with a fragmented soul.

Jesus concluded his teachings on worry with one of his best-remembered quotes from the Sermon on the Mounts: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. Therefore, don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (vv. 33-34).

Two words in Jesus's declaration deserve clarification: kingdom and righteousness.

Kingdom. Simply stated, God's kingdom is God's rule in the hearts of people. To cut off the suffix -dom from this word the word king. God wants nothing more than to be king of your life and my life, your heart and my heart. Jesus doesn't want to make us more religious; he wants to make us more alive. When the rule of God becomes the defining reality of our lives, worry is no longer welcome.

Righteousness. As mentioned earlier, righteousness is to be in the right relationship with another person. For the Jesus follower, if our relationship with God is in good standing, no circumstance can alarm us because nothing can truly harm us.

In the journey of following Jesus, we're invited to receive vital disciplines to ensure a growing relationship with him—generosity, prayer, and fasting. We're also asked to surrender all that is unnecessary in our lives—worry, anxiety, and fear. Jesus's kingdom and God's righteousness demand nothing less.

Reflection

Are you more comfortable asking for God's help or giving yourself over to his care? Are you more inclined to receive or surrender as you pray? God's kingship over our lives means that we're free to ask him to provide and protect.

adapted from Deron Spoo's "The Good Book"

25 | Life over the Long Haul



"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." Matthew 7:24

While it may be easy to initially enter into a relationship with Jesus, it can be incredibly difficult to stay the course of faithfulness and transformation for the rest of our lives. However, this is exactly what Jesus calls us into – a life of discipleship. Jesus invites us to take up our cross daily and follow him, allowing his presence to transform us into his own image.

Matthew 7 specifically focuses on the choices that people can make in the process of following Jesus. This is important to Him because our choices ultimately form our character and will shape the way that we relate with others, with God, and even with ourselves.

Verses 1-6 cover the topic of judging others. While Jesus does not expect us to naively be unaware of the reality and existence of evil in our imperfect world, we are not to live in a mindset of unchecked negativity and suspicion towards others. **Verses 7-11** present to us our choice between a life full of prayer or a life of prayerlessness. Some people are afraid of "praying the wrong way" and so choose to not pray at all. However, Richard Foster offers this insight: "In the same way that a small child cannot draw a bad picture so a child of God cannot offer a bad prayer." Thus, as children of God, we can choose to pray – even when we feel like we do not know how, and even when we can't always put our thoughts into words. **Verse 12** talks about how we can choose to treat other people. Jesus here states "whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets". Confucius, Plato, and the noted Jewish rabbi Hillel all have stated some version of this. However, their statements suggested what you don't want done to yourself, don't do to others. Jesus' approach however encourages taking initiative in doing good, rather than a prohibition against bad, which encourages us to act in the best interest of others. **Verses 13-14** presents to us the choice of choosing our path of life – either the narrow or the broad road. While the broad road may be easier, it is ultimately not the best choice. On the other hand, the narrow road will present its challenges, but will prove to be the best choice to make. **Verses 15-23** cover the topic of choosing who we allow to influence our lives. Jesus here warns against false teachers and those who may take advantage of others for their own gain. While he doesn't advocate suspicion toward others, he cautions us to select carefully those we place in positions of influence over us.

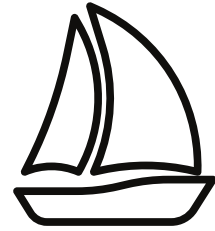
Finally, **verses 24-27** talk about the choice that we have in who we become. Jesus says that those who hear his words and do them are wise and will be able to stand the test of time.

Reflection

Verses 28-29 demonstrate the crowd's reaction to Jesus' teaching because he taught them as one who had authority. Have you allowed Jesus and his teaching to have the final say in your life? Why or why not? What area is God asking you to release unto his authority? Take a moment to pray through these questions.

adapted from Deron Spoo's "The Good Book"

26 | Is Jesus Strong Enough?



"...and as they were sailing he fell asleep. Then a fierce windstorm came down on the lake; they were being swamped and were in danger. They came and woke him up, saying, 'Master, Master, we're going to die!' Then he got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves. So they ceased and there was a calm. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were fearful and amazed, asking one another, 'Who then is this? He commands even the winds and the waves, and they obey him!'" Luke 8:23-35

In the Gospels, Jesus performs thirty-five miracles which are broken into four categories: overriding nature (9), exorcisms (6), physical healing (17), and resuscitations (3). In this passage, we see a miracle from each of these categories.

The first is when Jesus and his disciples get onto the boat after Jesus finishes telling the crowds the parable of the sower and the seeds. Storms were common on the Sea of Galilee and some of these disciples were experienced fishermen, yet when the storm came, they were all afraid. Only His Divine Nature has the power to turn the tides, the winds, and other things of this world we may face. And this is only the first type of His miracles.

Next, Jesus came across Legion, who possessed one of the men Jesus encountered upon landing on shore. A legion in the Roman era was a group that contained more than 6,000 soldiers. It was Legion versus Jesus. The numbers seem to be in favor of Legion yet they were no match for the power of Jesus. He cast them into a herd of pigs. Jesus is able to overcome any evil we may face.

The final two are of the healing type: the healing of the bleeding woman and the resuscitation of Jairus' daughter. Jairus approached Jesus in the crowds to come heal his dying daughter. While wading through the crowds, a woman who suffered from an incurable blood disorder touched His robes, and His power went out from Him. He was not in a hurry, despite Jairus' daughter dying, and gave this woman his full attention and brought not only the physical healing but also emotional wholeness to her life. Jesus is strong enough to heal all that we may face.

Once Jesus arrives at Jairus' home, they are told the girl is already dead. Although it seems too late, Jesus does not give up. With a gentle word and caring touch, Jesus is able to bring this girl back to life, reclaiming her from death. Even death has no power over Jesus.

Many say Jesus was an amazing teacher or moral philosopher, but he was so much more. What sets Jesus apart from the rest of the teachers and philosophers was his divine power as seen in these miracles. He came not only to teach and impart wisdom, but to bear the burdens of this world with His divine power.

Reflection

What would you like to see God do in your life? Have you asked Him? Unless it contradicts His Word or nature, he will answer in the best way possible.

adapted from Deron Spoo's "The Good Book"

27 | The Original Come-To Jesus Meeting



Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly I say you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

For many of us, we are far more familiar with John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." But to grasp the weight of this truth, it begins with understanding what Jesus meant by the phrase "born again" in our passage this morning. Clearly in our text, Nicodemus struggled with Jesus' words because how could someone be born again? Again, he is caught up in the physical reality and limitations that he misses the deeper truth of Jesus' words.

To provide some context, Nicodemus was a religious leader, a Pharisee who lived according to all the rules and regulations of the Mosaic commandments. The only way to live was through fearful obedience. And so you can imagine the questions Nicodemus struggles with when Jesus says the only way to the Kingdom of God was to be born again. What did Jesus mean by that? Deron Spoo writes that to be born again was that "God offers a new beginning to anyone, anywhere, at any moment. There are no hoops to jump through. No religious rigors to perform. Dirty lives can be made clean. Lives lived distanced from God are allowed to come home."

And there was no better way to describe the invitation to this life with God than to be born again. God's attitude toward you is not of wrath and judgment, but one of grace and love. Some are under the impression God is only here to judge us and condemn us based on whether we do "good" or "bad". John 3:16 disagrees. Some think God doesn't care about the world and is distant from us. John 3:16 disagrees. Some think we cannot be with God because of what we've done in our past. John 3:16 disagrees.

Spoo writes of an experience of when this verse became a reality for him. He writes "When I was a young man, my pastor visited my home to talk with me about my relationship with God—or rather my lack of relationship with God. He asked me to read John 3:16 and then explained very clearly to my young mind that the phrase "For God loved the world" could just as easily read, "For God loved Deron." My simple heart embraced a mysterious faith. I made a fresh start. God moved my heart toward him that day."

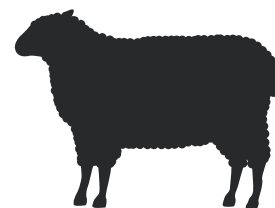
For God so loved you (insert your own name), that he gave his one and only Son that we might find eternal life in Him. There is no greater proof of his love than this. Romans 5:8 teaches us that God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Reflection

Take some time to meditate on this passage and remind yourself how much you are loved by Him because of what He has done for you. How does that change the way you live for Him?

adapted from Deron Spoo's "The Good Book"

28 | God is Looking for What He Loves



"I tell you, in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who don't need repentance" Luke 15:7

In this chapter, Jesus tells three parables that have been called "the gospel in the gospel" – the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son.

As an agrarian society, the crowds that Jesus spoke to would know sheep and shepherding well. A shepherd would be able to look at his herd and know if one was missing, which in the case of Jesus' parable, one was. The sheep did not mean to go astray, it just did not know. This is also the fact in our world today. Some people do not know that they are wandering from God. But He is our shepherd and wants to have a personal and protective relationship with us. We may not be aware of God all the time, but he is fully aware of us.

In Jesus' day, houses had dirt floors and little lighting, so it seems pretty easy to lose a coin. A coin of this time would be worth a days wage, and I would be very desperate to find it if it meant that I could get my food for the day. No one would lose this on purpose; it was an accident. Today, some people don't realize that they are neglecting their relationship with God by accident. It is easy to take our eyes off Jesus when we get so caught up in things going on in our lives: work, family, church, friends. We sometimes think that we are too busy to keep our focus on God, but He is never too busy to keep his full attention on us.

The last parable tells us about a son who wants to take his inheritance early (which usually only happens after the father dies). This is an intentional act. Prodigal means to spend freely which is what we see comes to pass with this younger son. But it seems that he is not the only one who is prodigal. We see that the son is prodigal in his finance, we see that the father is prodigal in his love. The father is able to forgive his son freely as if the son had never left in the first place. It's amazing to think that sometimes our intentional actions can draw us so far from the Father's love. We end up like this youngest son and at our lowest point realize that we too need to come back to the Father's house and receive His love that He pours out so freely.

Whether it is by ignorance, accident, or intention, God never stops looking for us. In v20, when the son was a long way off, the father saw him, and he came running to embrace his son. He was waiting to celebrate the return of his lost son. God is ready and waiting to receive us home with joy!

Reflection

Meditate or listen to the lyrics of Reckless Love by Cory Asbury. How does it make you feel that He wants to have a right relationship with you? What is holding you back from experiencing His lavish love for us?

Matthew 6

28 "And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing,

29 yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are.

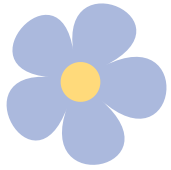
30 And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

31 "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?'

32 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.

33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.





No Worries!

In today's bible passage, we get a glimpse of what it looks like to not worry and to trust in God. I understand that it's not easy at times. We can't help but worry about our families, what we care about, and what tomorrow may look like. It may even feel natural to worry because a lot of times we just care a lot. Well, today's bible passage teaches us that we don't have to worry anymore. As a matter of fact, God doesn't want our hearts and our lives to be filled with worry. And the reason is quite simple: Jesus wants us to trust that He will take care of us. If God can take care of the beautiful flowers and even feed the birds we see outside, how much more will God take care of His children?

In verse 33, we learn that all we really need to do is love God, seek Him, and His righteousness. Nothing more and nothing less! All we basically need to do is love Him and God will do the rest! He takes care of our families and knows what tomorrow will look like. God simply knows the best so let's trust in Him!

Reflection/Prayer

1. What do you often worry about?

2. Do you think God can take care of the things you are worrying about?

3. What is God asking us to do instead of worrying? (refer to Matthew 6:33)

Prayer: "Dear God, Thank you for teaching us what it looks like to not worry and to trust in You. Help us

to give our worries to you and to have the faith to believe that You know what is best for us."