

THE SERMON
ON THE MOUNT
GOD'S KINGDOM COME

»»————→ Matthew 5-7 ←————««

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

FALL 2016

ST. PAUL'S EVANGELICAL CHURCH

Introduction

Thank you. As your pastor, it is hard to express the gratitude I have for the commitment of your time and energy in hosting and leading this group. I believe that life-change happens in small groups in a way that can't be replicated elsewhere. Small groups take time and energy, so thank you for your commitment.

The Goal. The goal of small groups is to grow in discipleship. A *disciple is someone who is being transformed by the Gospel to serve God and others*. This transformation happens as we come into contact with the God of truth and grace, and we submit ourselves to his ways. The Bible is the only way to know God and his commandments, and so small groups are fundamentally Bible-centered.

The Most Important Thing. We believe that Jesus' work of salvation – his death on the cross, his resurrection victory over death, his opening the gate to eternal life – is the motivation for all that we do. Do not shy away from reminding or teaching about the Gospel!

The Inductive Method. The word "inductive" means to make conclusions about God and his ways by way of careful observation and analysis of the Bible. The three steps are observation, interpretation, and application. In other words, "What does it say," "What does it mean," and "What does it mean to me?" This way of studying the Bible helps us follow 2 Tim 2:15, that we would properly handle the word of truth.

How to Use This Study. The icebreaker questions are recommended to get the group going and get to know each other better. When it is time to pray, be sensitive to people who aren't ready yet, but be sure not to hog the prayer to yourself! As regards the questions, there are perhaps more than you can get to. Choose the best ones

and add some yourself if you would like. In red, you will see helpful hints or answers to prepare you to lead the study.

Observation. These questions seem obvious but are the most important of all. Training yourself to slow down and simply notice the words and layout of the passage is essential. Often, after slowing down, you will notice that a certain phrase is repeated, or there is a structure to the passage. These things are not accidents. The biblical writers were masters at using structure to convey meaning.

Interpretation. This part of the study is where we figure out what it means. For example, in the study on adultery, we see that Jesus forbids lust. What is lust? How do we know what Jesus considered to be lust? Those are questions of interpretation. After each study, you will see a leader's guide with answers or ideas on difficult questions of interpretation. Your group members will have good answers and thoughts. Encourage discussion of interpretation to help people analyze and ponder God's word.

Application. This is where we take the Bible and follow through on it. Sometimes, application takes place in our hearts, like stopping worrying because God is in control. Sometimes, application is something we need to do, like spending time with your family or giving to the poor. Without application, we are in danger of being "puffed up" with knowledge and ending up "hearers of the word only, but not doers." Application is personal and takes vulnerability. Do what you can to model that vulnerability by talking about what you are learning from God as you study.

Have fun. Small groups are relational as much as anything, so have fun! Get to know your group, do special events as the Spirit leads, serve each other, eat together, and enjoy each other's friendship.

"The Blessed Life" Small Group Lesson 1

Matthew 5:1-12

September 18




Introductions and catching up. As a small group we are going to journey together in God's word for the next 9 weeks. This will be a place where, every week, we pray and encourage each other as we grow in our understanding of God's word together.

Go around the group and share three things: your name, how you came to live in St. Louis, and your favorite highlight from the summer. Make sure everyone has a chance to contribute.



Prayer. Trade prayer requests with one another as you feel comfortable about anything that is on your heart. Assign someone to write down the prayer requests. Depending on your group, divide up the prayers or your small group leader will pray for them.

Studying the word. For the next 9 weeks, we are going to practice the "inductive Bible study method." This is a way of investigating and using our powers of observation and logic to deduce the true meaning of a given passage. Only after studying the text together will we begin to apply it to our lives or to the world around us.

You will see three different symbols as we learn this method. These refer to the three steps of inductive method. The three symbols are

, , and , which correspond to observation, interpretation, and application. This will help us get to the meaning of the Bible.

Observation

-  Have someone volunteer to read Matthew 5:1-12 out loud.
-  Who is Jesus talking to in this passage?
 - **The answer is both "crowds" and especially the disciples (vs. 1). Commentator Lloyd-Jones notes**

that it was a sermon which lasted several hours, with more and more of the crowd coming closer to listen. This was a sermon for the committed (i.e. disciples), but was delivered to many (crowds).

- 🔍 Look closely at the passage. Do you notice any repeated phrases?
 - “Blessed are the ...”
 - “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (2x, vs. 3 & 10)
 - “For they shall ...”
- 🔍 What characteristics do the people have who are going to receive blessing? Make a list.
- 🔍 What are the blessings which are promised? Are they for now or later?
- 🔍 Is there any part of this passage that really startles you?
 - This question hopes to illicit other observations that weren't asked for directly in the previous questions. Also, it will open doors to good interpretation questions as we try to figure out the meaning of those “startling” verses.

Interpretation

- 💡 What does the word “blessed” mean? Use a Study Bible or google search to help figure it out.
 - The Greek word “makarios,” here translated blessing, means happy. ESV Study Bible: “More than a temporary or circumstantial feeling of happiness, this is a state of well-being in relationship to God.”
- 💡 Are there 9 different sorts of people listed in this passage who receive different blessings, or is Jesus talking about something that comes as a package deal? Why do you think that?

- The blessings are a package deal. There is unity in this section because it has “bookends” in verse 3 and verse 10, “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus wants us to see this as one package of blessings that come to the person who enters the kingdom.
- 💡 How do the future promises “shall inherit the earth, shall be comforted, etc.” grant blessing in the present?
 - We can have a confident and peaceful life, even in the midst of struggle or persecution, knowing that the day is coming when God will set all things right.
- 💡 What do you think Jesus was trying to accomplish when he gave this sermon?
- 💡 What's the main idea of this passage?
 - Do your best to summarize this on your own. It is something like, “True happiness (blessing) comes from relationship with God, through which we receive the kingdom and begin being conformed into God's likeness.”

Application

- Head – how does this passage challenge the way our culture today thinks? How do you think?
- Heart – is there any way that Jesus' words ignite a passion in your heart? Do they give you comfort or hope? Does it change your priorities or perspectives? How?
- Hands – how would this passage change what you do, where you go, or who you?

Close With Prayer.

“Dealing With Anger” **Small Group Lesson 2**




Matthew 5:17-26

September 25






Getting Started. We're still getting to know one another, so let's start with a fun question. If you had \$10,000 to spend on one thing before the end of the week, what would it be and why?

Prayer. Let's pray for each other as we have need. Take some time to share prayer requests (no prayer is too big or too small for God!) Each person should pray for the person next to them if they are comfortable. It's OK to not have any prayer requests.

Studying the word. We continue the inductive method today. You will see these three different symbols which correspond to

observation, interpretation, and application , , and . This will help us get to the meaning of the Bible.

Observation

-  Have a volunteer read Matthew 5:17-26 aloud.
-  Make a list of things which Jesus says about the Law and God's commandments.
 - **He is not here to abolish them, but fulfill them.**
 - **All of the law will be accomplished.**
 - **We should not relax the commandments, but do them and teach them.**
-  What, according to Jesus, is equal to murder?
-  What does Jesus command when a person is angry with a brother or sister in Christ?
 - **Be reconciled to them prior to worship.**
-  According to this passage, what are the consequences of anger? (Consider immediate and eternal consequences)

- Eternally, Jesus warns of hell. Immediately, broken relationships with those around you (verse 23-25).

Interpretation

- 💡 What was Jesus' attitude about the law of God?
- 💡 Verse 22 is subject to many interpretations. Looking at that verse, what are you sure Jesus was trying to communicate?
 - There is not enough space to explain this verse. Here is what is sure: Jesus condemns anger and insult. These both result in severe penalty.
- 💡 Does the altar (v. 23) correspond to anything in today's world?
 - The altar, as a place of worship, corresponds to fellowship in church.
- 💡 If the punishment for anger is judgment and hell, and we need righteousness greater than the Pharisees to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, what hope is there? How does this mesh with the rest of Scripture?
 - It is good to remember the distinction of law and Gospel. The law (here teaching about anger) tells us of God's commandment and the penalty of breaking it. Romans says that the law is powerless to change hearts, but that it makes us know our sin and need of forgiveness (Romans 3:20).
 - The rest of Scripture explains that Jesus fulfilled the law by obeying it perfectly and dying for us, to atone for our sin. (Romans 3:24-25) This enables us to begin to fulfill the law in our lives, now, albeit imperfectly. (Romans 8:3-4)
- 💡 Read aloud Jeremiah 17:10. What is the relation of the heart and outward conduct? According to Jesus, does God judge the heart alone or only actions?

Application** A Case Study.**

In October 2006, Charles Roberts killed ten young schoolgirls in Lancaster, PA with a firearm. Then he took his own life. The schoolgirls were Amish, but Charles was not. That afternoon, the grandfather of one of the Amish girls visited the Roberts family and expressed forgiveness to Charles for his crime and sorrow for their loss. Nearly the entire Amish community reached out to forgive Charles, outnumbering the non-Amish at his funeral. They expressed no anger or condemnation toward him, and pursued a path of peace instead.

Does the response of the Amish community surprise you?

It is likely that you get quite angry for much less of an infraction. Why is that? Is it possible to live at peace with others?

If you have a dispute with someone else, what does God call you to do with that person? Is there someone to whom you need be reconciled?

Is there something in your past which still angers you? (If you feel comfortable, you can share it). How can you forgive that person?

You are very much encouraged to share something personal here at the end, if you are willing. It may help other people start to deal with anger in their heart.

"Making a Difference" Small Group Lesson 3

Matthew 5:13-16

October 2





Getting Started.

Go around the table and have each person name one person that is not a family member that has had the greatest influence in your life, and why.


Prayer. Let's pray for each other as we have need. Take some time to share prayer requests (no prayer is too big or too small for God!) Each person should pray for the person next to them if they are comfortable. It's OK to not have any prayer requests.

The Inductive Method of Bible Study. The goal is to understand and obey what God is communicating to us in his word. To do this we will be like detectives, observing the information and drawing conclusions as we ask good questions about what it means.

Observation

-  Have a volunteer read Matthew 5:13-16 aloud.
-  Who is Jesus talking to? (look at vss. 1-2)
-  What metaphors does Jesus use to describe his audience?
 - Salt and Light
-  What does Jesus instruct his people to do?
 - Vs. 16 has the answer.

Interpretation

-  What do the two metaphors have in common?
 - They are both of benefit to the people around. Salt as preservation and seasoning, light as something to help avoid stumbling and show the way.
 - They both could be of no benefit if used wrong. Salt could lose its taste, and light could be hidden.

- 💡 How are they different?
 - Salt loses its taste when it loses its purity and gets spread too thin. Perhaps this is a metaphor for being defiled by the world.
 - Light fails to illuminate if it is hidden, teaching that we should always live for God.
- 💡 What does the metaphor of "salt" convey?
 - Check study Bible notes.
 - Google different possibilities
 - What can you conclude for sure?

Salt was a seasoning and preservative. Being the "salt" of the world means that God's people were to preserve the world through their obedience to God's commandments, which results in moral purity. Salt would become "tasteless" if it was dissolved in too much water or diluted somehow. God's people should avoid becoming "tasteless" by mixing God's ways with the ways of the world. This is a call to wholehearted devotion to God and his ways, which in turn blesses the world around.

- 💡 What does the metaphor of light convey?
 - Are there cross-references to other passages in your Bible's margins? (Eph. 5:7-12, John 1:4-9)
 - What is the general symbolism of light and dark?
- 💡 What attitude or perspective is Jesus trying to cultivate in his disciples?
- 💡 What do you think are the "good deeds" (v. 16) that Jesus wants his people to carry out? (hint: consider the next verse too).
- 💡 What is the opposite of what Jesus is teaching?
- 💡 What does it mean that "if salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?" What is Jesus getting at?

- 💡 How do we reconcile Jesus' teaching to "Let your light shine before men" and his teaching later in Matthew 6:1, "Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them?"
 - This is tricky. God wants us to live our faith no matter who we are around or where we are at, but our attitude should never be "Look at me! Look at me!" God knows our heart attitude, whether we are living rightly just when others see, or even in secret.

Application

- Where does the world need us to be "salt" and "light?"
 - If your group is having trouble thinking of something, have them consider recent news stories. Think of poverty or war, racism or broken homes. Think of pornography addictions and selfish parents. There are a myriad of possibilities here.
 - Do I know someone that needs me to be a light in their life?
 - What is stopping me?
 - What can I do?
- Read John 3:19-21. What reactions might we expect as we live as light in the world? Will there be some positive reaction? Some negative? Why?
- Is there a way that we, as a group, could be a light to someone this week?
 - Could we serve someone or bless somebody?
 - This could be an excellent opportunity to do something as a group to make a difference. A good small group cares for each other, and if a good idea is there, maybe you could serve a neighbor or friend in need.

"Adultery"**Small Group Lesson 4**

Matthew 5:27-32

October 9

Getting Started.

Have each person answer this question: "If you could change one law, what would it be?" Nobody is allowed to duplicate another person's answer. 😊

Prayer. Let's pray for each other as we have need. Take some time to share prayer requests (no prayer is too big or too small for God!) Each person should pray for the person next to them if they are comfortable. It's OK to not have any prayer requests.

Special Note (read aloud): Today we are touching on a very difficult subject in our world today. The command "thou shalt not commit adultery" is still held by the world in the strict sense – most people view cheating to be a grievous betrayal and failure. Jesus takes this command and goes deeper, moving past external actions into the realm of what happens even in a person's mind.

As we explore this topic, your pastors at St. Paul's recognize that most families have felt the pain of adultery and divorce. In this study, be sure to refrain from passing judgment on another. Also, be sensitive to people's histories. Wounds from the past take a long time to heal. God's intention through the cross of Jesus is to forgive, heal, and transform those hurt by or trapped in the sin of adultery. It is not a weapon of judgment and condemnation.

There is nothing easy about this subject. It is deeply personal and there is often a great amount of shame involved with those who have stumbled. As a result, most of sexual sin is unconfessed. Usually when teaching on this subject people shut down, or just listen. People may have been burned in the past by Christians or the

church on this one and will be extra-aware of the environment of the people. Do what you can as a leader to listen and not to judge if people share parts of their lives.

Observation

- 🔍 Have someone read Matthew 5:27-32 aloud.
- 🔍 Make a list of the explicit commands that Jesus gives in this passage (hint: there are two)
 - **Gouge it out... and cut it off...**
- 🔍 Add any implied commands to the above list.
 - **Implicitly: "do not look at a woman lustfully."**
 - **Don't commit adultery.**
 - **Fear an afterlife of punishment...**
- 🔍 Two times Jesus gives a reason for this command. What is this reason?

Interpretation

- 💡 Is Jesus disagreeing with the original commandment "thou shalt not commit adultery?" Why or why not?
- 💡 **In this passage and others, Jesus is never disagreeing with the original commandment. He is showing that its true meaning goes past the strict meaning of the text.**
- 💡 What does the word "lust" entail? How do you know if you are lusting?
 - **Definitions vary. The word Jesus used is a normal word for lust, meaning, "To have strong sexual desire for someone."**
 - **Your pastors believe there is a difference between noticing a person's physical attractiveness and lust. Lust happens when the heart says, "I want *that* for me." Lust spins out of control when fantasy begins to indulge these temptations in the mind.**

- 💡 Does God want us to literally gouge out our eyes and cut off our hands? If not, then what is Jesus trying to say?
- 💡 This passage explains the penalty for breaking this commandment is "hell."
 - What is hell? How do you know that? (consider these verses)
 - Matthew 25:46, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Matthew 13:50
 - What percentage of people that reach adulthood do you guess would deserve hell based on these criteria?
 - Is Jesus indicating this to be a hopeless situation? Yes or no?
 - Look at Romans 4:7-8, Romans 3:21-24, Ephesians 2:8-9
- 💡 This previous string of questions could really be applied to any situation. The penalty for any sin is hell (which is eternal separation from God). 100% of people deserve hell. It is not a hopeless situation because Jesus took our sin.
- 💡 This was inserted here because we want to combat all of sin with the grace of the cross. Jesus' love for us in the midst of our sin is the way that we overcome our failures.

Application

- What are some ways lust is embraced in today's world?
- Since there is forgiveness for the sin of adultery, are we free to lust and sin? How do you know?
- Romans 6:1-2 "...Shall we go on sinning so grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?"

- Read aloud Ephesians 5:8-14. What is a way someone struggling with a sin in this area could bring “deeds of darkness” into the light?
- If you or anyone in your small group has a story they could share, it would be good to. This could break the ice and signal that this is a safe place to confess sin and experience forgiveness.
- Pastor Brian speaking here. My walk with Christ skyrocketed as I brought this realm of my life under His lordship when I was 19-20. In order to grow I had to have people I confessed my sin too, people who weren't judging me, who were rooting for me and helping me along. You can share this brief story if you want.
- NOTE: Contact a pastor if you need help in this area. If the Spirit is convicting you, our church can offer help!

“Speaking the Truth” **Small Group Lesson 5**

Matthew 5:33-37

October 16





Getting Started.

Here is this week's icebreaker question: is there a fad you wish would come back? If not, is there one you want to stay gone forever? Give each person a chance to share.



Prayer. This week, we are going to thank God for the beauty of his creation. He is the Creator and Maker of all things, so let us take a moment to give glory to him. Each person should share personal prayer requests and also the part of the physical, created world for which they are most thankful. Then spend some time praying for that.

Studying the word. By way of reminder, the three steps of faithful Bible study are observation, interpretation, and application. The goal is to use our powers of investigation and reasoning to figure out what God is saying in this passage.

Observation

-  Have someone read Matthew 5:33-37 aloud.
-  Jesus was quoting passages from the Old Testament. Have someone else read Leviticus 19:12, Numbers 30:2, Deuteronomy 23:21.
-  What are you not supposed to make oaths upon, according to this passage?
-  What is the goal according to verse 37?

Interpretation

-  Is Jesus, in teaching that we are to take no oaths, disagreeing with the Old Testament command to fulfill all of our oaths? Why or why not?
-  **What Jesus is really teaching about is that we would live in a way so that no oath would even be needed. The phrase, “I**

promise!” really conveys that sometimes, our words are not true, so we qualify something with words to say that we really mean it. Jesus wants everything we say to be something that we “really mean.”

- 💡 What was the purpose of the Old Testament command?
- 💡 What was the purpose of Jesus' command?
- 💡 According to D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, “The Pharisees drew a distinction between various oaths, saying that some were binding while others were not. If you took an oath by the temple, that was not binding; but if you took an oath by the gold of the temple, that was binding... Do you notice how our Lord poured his scorn and ridicule... upon the utter dishonesty of it all?” What's the main point of all of this?
- 💡 Apparently, some Pharisees thought that oaths made “To the Lord” were the only binding oaths. So an oath made by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or your own head were not technically made “To the Lord.” And so the Pharisees were trying to find a way to be dishonest while not breaking God's commandment. That is what Jesus “poured his scorn and ridicule” upon, according to Lloyd-Jones.

Application

- What are some ways that we see untruthfulness in our world? Consider the realm of law, business, medicine, and marketing. Consider interpersonal relationships.
- What do you think about honesty if a wife asks her husband if she looks good in an outfit? Is honesty appropriate? Why?
- It was once the case that lands or homes could be sold with just a handshake and verbal agreement. Why not today?

A Case Study. Once upon a time a ten-year-old girl asked her dad if, next weekend, they could go together to the mall and shop for some new shoes. While staring at his phone, the dad replied, “Yeah,

sure honey.” The girl walked closer to her dad, tugged at his sleeve until he looked at her. Then she asked him, “Do you promise?”

What is the reason she needed a promise?

Why do you think he would say yes when he didn't mean it?

Do you think she believes him when he speaks without a promise?

Do you think the girl respects and trusts her dad? Why or why not?

How could the dad live so that she would take him at his word?

"Don't Retaliate"**Small Group Lesson 6**

Matthew 5:38-48, 7:1-6




October 23

Getting Started.







Have each person share their answer to this question: "If you could master one skill you don't have right now, what would it be?"

Prayer. Go around the room clockwise, sharing prayer requests. After each person shares, have the person next to them pray for those requests if comfortable. Repeat until everyone has been prayed for.

The Inductive Bible Study Method. Following the steps of

observation , interpretation , and application  helps us get at the original meaning and responsibly bring it to speak to our current day.

Observation

-  Have someone read Matthew 5:38-48 and 7:1-6 aloud.
-  What is the O.T. command Jesus teaches about in vs. 38? (Look at Dt. 19:20-21) What does Jesus say about this?
-  What examples does he give on how to do this? (vss. 39-42)
-  In verse 43, Jesus is not dealing with an O.T. command but a teaching of his day. What does he command instead?
-  What reasons does he give? (vss. 45-48)
 - "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."
 - He causes rain to fall on good and evil people alike.
 - No reward for loving those who love you back, that's not even different than tax collectors!
 - This is how God, in his perfection, treats us.
-  In chapter 7:1-5, what command does Jesus give to his followers?

- 🔍 Identify the two reasons that Jesus tells his people not to judge.

Interpretation

- 💡 How do we “be children” of the heavenly Father when we forgive enemies? What is the connection?
- 💡 The connection is that our heavenly father blesses the evil people too. In theology, this is called “common grace.” We too are called to do good to those who are evil, and trust God to avenge and give justice at the end of time.
- 💡 Is the command in vs. 39 relevant to governments and police officers? (Consider Romans 13:1-4, 1 Peter 2:13-14). If not, then what is the point of the teaching?
- 💡 The command in vs. 39 is for interpersonal relationships. God tells us to submit to governments who punish evil and reward good. This is one way that God protects society.
- 💡 How does God’s treatment of us, others, and the whole human race help us to love our enemies?
- 💡 What does “judge” mean in chapter 7?
- 💡 This is deeply misunderstood today. Some people say “judge” means to say that one thing is right and another is wrong. On the contrary, God consistently calls his people to know and declare what is right and wrong. Instead, “judge” is better understood to mean “assigning consequences to an action.” We shouldn’t be handing out consequences for others’ actions, when our own actions would deserve consequences as well, but we pay attention to them not us.
- 💡 Is it ever wrong to remove the speck from your brother’s eye? Why or why not? (Consider Galatians 6:1). God desires the Christian community to be one of truth and love. The truth component involves lifting people out of

their sin. We should not do this in a harsh or hypocritical way, but in a way where others may receive it.

- 💡 What reward is Jesus talking about in vs. 46? Is it wrong to be motivated by that reward?
- 💡 Can you put into words the connection between the first part of vs. 45 and vs. 48? (If you agree there is a connection)
- 💡 **We bless those who do evil to us, because God is patient and gracious to those who do evil as well. In this way, we imitate God's love.**

Application

- Do you have enemies? If so, how can you forgive them?
- Jesus wants us to focus on God and his treatment of us to get motivation/power to treat others the same. What ways, this week, will you focus on Jesus? Write down one particular thing you will do, and next week we will check up on each other to see how we did.
- The cross is the ultimate example of forgiving your enemies (Romans 5:10-12 and following verses). Have you ever thought of yourself as having once been an enemy of God? Does God's forgiveness of you motivate you to forgive others?
- Where do you find yourself judging and condemning others? How can you avoid that attitude?
- What is a way to be prophetic (i.e. speak out against evil) without being judgmental? Is it possible?

End with Prayer. Pray, forgiving your enemies, either past or present. Be as specific as you feel comfortable. Pray for those who have wronged you, hurt you, frustrated you, or treated you badly.

"Jesus and Giving"**Small Group Lesson 7**

Matthew 6:1-4, 19-24

October 30




Icebreaker question. In what ways are you the same as your childhood self? Give everyone a chance to answer.

Checking in. Last week we said we would do one thing to stay focused on Jesus. How did you do? Let people share if they followed through on their commitment.




Prayer. This week, we are going to pray for issues that are going on in society, since the election is right before us. If someone has an urgent prayer request, lift that as well. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-3 "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior."

- Coming elections and those currently elected
- Issues of national importance
- Our local city and schools
- Pressing issues from the news
- Children and youth

The Inductive Bible Study Method. Following the steps of

observation , interpretation , and application  helps us get at the original meaning and responsibly bring it to speak to our current day. Let's ask the Spirit to guide us as we get into God's word. (The leader should pray or have someone pray).

Observation

-  Have someone read aloud Matthew 6:1-4, 19-24.
-  What is the warning that Jesus gives in 6:1?
-  What is the reason for the warning?

- 🔍 What was commonplace in Jesus' day that made him give the warning? (vss. 2-4)
- 🔍 What reasons does Jesus give for not laying up treasures on earth? (There are at least two reasons)
 - They are destroyed by moths and rust.
 - They are stolen by thieves.
- 🔍 What two masters would Jesus have us choose between?

Interpretation

- 💡 What is the nature of the "reward" that Jesus is speaking about in verse 1? What is the reward in verse 2?
- 💡 What does it mean to not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing?
- 💡 **At the least, it means to keep it hidden. It may also mean to have an attitude in your heart, where you are not even thinking much of yourself as you give. Avoid thinking, "I am great because I gave so much!"**
- 💡 Regarding verse 21: How does it work? Is it that, if you place your treasure somewhere, that your heart will follow? Or is it that if your heart is in a certain place, your treasure will follow?
- 💡 **The verdict is out on this one, because the Bible shows both to be true. We can lead our hearts with our actions, but actions flow from the heart as well. A faithful heart is cultivated by obedience, and vice versa.**
- 💡 Verses 22 and 23 are especially difficult to understand. How is the eye the lamp of the body? What do these verses mean?
 - Look at Study Bible notes.
 - Do an Internet search to see what comes up.
 - What can you conclude for certain about the meaning of these verses?

- 💡 First of all, let the group wrestle with the meaning. Opening up Study Bibles and looking at explanations is good training.
- 💡 Here is the ESV Study Bible: “The eye (similar to the ‘heart’ in Jewish literature) is a lamp that reveals the quality of a person’s inner life. A healthy eye (clear vision) suggests loyal devotion to God, while a bad eye (impaired vision) connotes moral corruption.
- 💡 Imagine a person with bad sight, “how great their darkness.” Literally, they may not see well. There is a play on words, that a person with bad morality cannot see the world correctly either, and in the same way walks in darkness.

Application

- How is your heart torn between God and money?
- When you give, are you seeking God’s reward or are you doing it in private?
- It is common to struggle with money because we find it to be our security and a statement of our worth. How can we live so that our security and identity are in God?
- For private reflection during the week: Do you need to give more? Who or what would God lead you to give to?

"How to Pray"

Small Group Lesson 8

Matthew 6:5-18, 7:7-11

November 6

Icebreaker question. If you could go any place in the world, where would you go, and why? How long would you stay there? Give everyone a chance to answer.

Prayer. Take some time for personal prayer requests. Lift up anything that is weighing heavily on your heart. As you feel comfortable, pray for one another.

Into the word we go! One prayer of ours, as pastors at St. Paul's, is that everyone in our church would feel very comfortable opening up their Bible. The things we pastors do to prepare these studies isn't magic, it can be learned. Go through the steps of observation, interpretation, and application and you can even write your own study. (You will get better with practice) 😊

Observation

- 🔍 Have someone read Matthew 6:5-18, 7:7-11 aloud.
- 🔍 What sticks out to you in this passage?
- 🔍 What are some heart attitudes that Jesus rebukes in this passage, with regard to prayer?
- 🔍 What are some heart attitudes of which Jesus approves?

Interpretation

- 💡 Is verse 6:6 to be followed literally, or is there instead some other point Jesus is making? What is that point?
- 💡 **This, again, is Jesus teaching to not obey God to be seen by men. Just like he taught with giving in Matt 6:1.**
- 💡 What is an example of an "empty phrase?"
- 💡 How does the Lord's prayer serve as a counterexample to the "empty phrases" of the hypocrites?

- 💡 By way of contrast, it is fascinating that Jesus packs so much into so few words. Jim Elliott reflected on the Lord's prayer in his diary, saying (this is a paraphrase), "There needs to be less words, bigger scope, more power, more trust!" We should know our heavenly Father hears, and not think that somehow the length of our prayers or the intensity of our devotion is why God responds.
- 💡 How do you interpret Matthew 6:14-15 in light of the other teachings of Scripture, that we are saved by God's grace, apart from works?
 - Hint: Avoid releasing the tension too easily. If this is a challenging passage, let it challenge you!
 - Romans 8:29-30 will help explain the relationship of forgiveness and obedience in the Christian life.
- 💡 The relationship between faith and works is so close as to be inseparable. Martin Luther said, "Faith alone saves, but saving faith is never alone." The EPCA statement of faith says, "God's justifying grace must not be separated from his sanctifying power."
- 💡 Why would a "hypocrite" want everyone to know they are fasting?
- 💡 What is the point of fasting?
 - Consider Acts 13:4 and 14:23 – the church fasted before making big decisions to seek God's answer.
- 💡 Fasting is a way of especially setting apart a time where an individual or community seeks God's face. It is a way to rely on God, not on food. The awareness of hunger brings to mind your reliance upon God. It is often done in times of special spiritual need, or even in a time of repentance.
- 💡 According to Matthew 7:7-11, what is the confidence we should have when we pray?

- 💡 How do we understand this verse in light of the fact that some prayers seem to go “unanswered” – and God may seem silent?

Application

- Take a moment to evaluate your prayer life. Is there any way that you could grow in it?
- What is a way to have the confident expectation in your heart that God will answer your prayer with a “fish”, not a “snake”?
- Do you remember any times that God answered a prayer in a particularly powerful way? Would you be open to sharing them with the group?
- Most Christians do not fast regularly. Is this a part of your spiritual life at all? Would you be open to it?
- How can the Lord's prayer teach us to pray? Is there one part of it which you may want to meditate on this next week?

“Don't Worry!”**Small Group Lesson 9**

Matthew 6:25-34





November 13

Icebreaker question. Who is your personal hero? What did he or she do that makes you look up to him or her?




Prayer. This will be our last meeting until small groups meet up again in January. So let's pray for each other, and if anyone has any prayers for the holidays (good time with family, a particular family member, etc.) let's lift that up.

Into the word we go! Do you have the hang of this yet? I hope so! Anyone can study the Bible if they take the time to make careful observation, ask good questions of interpretation (what it means), and then figures out how it can apply to life today.

Observation

-  Make a list of the imperatives in this passage (at least 5)
-  How many reasons can you find in this passage for not worrying? What are they?
-  Make a list of everything that God is in control of according to this passage.
-  What does God promise in this passage?

Interpretation

-  Why does Jesus give so many reasons in this passage about worry? Does that indicate anything about worry?
-  **It is likely that he gives so many reasons because we need them! Worry is natural, and sometimes even logical humanly speaking. We need extra assurance of God's love and provision in our lives.**
-  The Bible speaks often about diligent planning and avoiding pitfalls. (Proverbs 21:5, Romans 15:23-24, James 4:15, Luke

- 14:28). How is worrying similar to planning? How is it different?
- 💡 How do you reconcile Jesus' teaching with regards to planning and worry?
 - 💡 Worry is similar to planning in that they are both thinking about the future, and the future is always uncertain. We never know God's plan. Worry is different than planning because it doubts God's goodness and power in the midst of the plan. We should always plan and move forward faithfully, knowing God will do the best for us. A worrier might say, "If x, y, or z happens, what will I do?" and be afraid or anxious. Someone who plans while trusting God says, "If x, y, or z happens, God will provide somehow. So let's move forward confidently."
 - 💡 Why does Jesus call us "O ye of little faith?"
 - 💡 Almost all of human experience is lived out of self-reliance. We should learn to have faith to trust that he cares!
 - 💡 Why is worry a sin? What is its spiritual root cause?
 - 💡 The root cause may be different for different people. It could be anything from proud independence to uncertainty about the character of God.

Application

- What is it that worries you the most?
- Are you in control of this thing which worries you?
- In this passage, we learn that focusing on God and his sovereign care of us will help us to not worry. What ways, this week, will you focus on God's care?
- If we don't have to worry, then what are we free to do with that time instead?
- How can you seek God's kingdom and his righteousness?

- Read Psalm 37:25. How did King David (and the Holy Spirit speaking through him) try to encourage God's people to trust that God would provide?
 - Is there a way you need to hear that encouragement?
 - Is there a person to whom you could give that encouragement?
- Compare this passage to Philippians 4:8-9. What do they have in common to help us not worry?

A FINAL NOTE: Thank you for leading this Bible study. If there is a way that this format could be improved, let Pastor Brian know so that the January small group notes and helps could be improved upon.