

Follow: Learning from Matthew to Live Like Jesus
Faith UMC Lent Bible Study, 2025
Week 1

Matthew 5:1-20

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
3 ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
5 ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
6 ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
7 ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
8 ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
9 ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
10 ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 ‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
13 ‘You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.
14 ‘You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.
17 ‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Coaching Under the Master

All the seasons in my life when I experienced the most growth had one thing in common: I had an excellent coach.

There was Coach Dave, my first ice hockey coach. Coach Dave had a team of eighth-grade, high-smelling, ultra-hormonal boys on his hands. He couldn’t have cared less about the number of games we won. He cared about the kind of men we were becoming. He told us, “God gave you two ears and one mouth for a reason.” He modelled the narrow way of being both kind *and* commanding of respect. He told us we needed to organize our week around family, church,

school, and sports, in that order. When one of my teammates absolutely creamed an opposing player, knocking him flat on his back on the ice, then proceeded to help the opponent back to his skates, Coach Dave told us, “That’s how you play ice hockey.”

There was Mr. Constantine, or Mr. C as his students called him. Mr. C was my high school chemistry teacher. I’m confident he taught me the periodic table of the elements, but I’ve long forgotten. What I remember is spending lunch periods with Mr. C and a few other students he had taken under his wing. We soaked up his advice on how he would interpret tough passages in Scripture as an academic trained in both chemistry and psychology, what makes for a good dating relationship, and how he’d handle our high school drama.

There was Ron, a homeless man who lived on the street in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where I went to college. Ron sat and strummed his guitar on a patch of sidewalk in front of Starbucks, and at least once a week, my friends and I would take him dinner and crack open the Bible with him. Ron schooled us on the Bible. He didn’t teach us the history and context behind the Bible. He taught us what Jesus meant to him. Who better to teach a homeless prophet than a homeless prophet?

There was Tom, the senior pastor of the church where I was appointed after seminary. He taught me the ins and outs of preaching. He taught me how to wrestle with faith and let the congregation in on my wrestling, and how to care for people and navigate decisions where there’s no “win-win.”

There was John, another homeless man, this time a former church member. John taught me joy. He glowed with unforced joy. I thought what I needed as a young pastor was more business skill, but as I grew close to John over Bible study and hot tea in my office, he showed me I need human skills like how to be patient, how to be interruptible, how to listen like you mean it, and how to waste time on someone you love.

The reason I lift up these people is because they form a pattern over the timeline of my life. The pattern is, *I grew as a person when I had a coach*. Only one of these men was an actual sports coach. The others were mentors and role models. I went through developmental leaps, meaning I grew quickly and in the right direction, when I made room for these coaches in my

life. These coaches valued *character* over *content*. More important than mastering the content of a game, subject, skill, or the Bible was growing in character as a human being. Was the content important? It sure was. But character, or learning “how to be” in the world, trumped the mechanics of content every time.

Jesus is that kind of coach for us, and we are called to be a particular kind of student, the kind of student the Gospel of Matthew calls a disciple. We’ll discuss six markers of what it means to be a follower of Jesus in this study of Matthew. The first marker is Coaching Under the Master. It’s a lifestyle where we claim Jesus as our coach, place ourselves under the coach, soak up the learning from the coach, and become more like the coach with every passing day.

If Jesus is our coach, that means he’s the coach *of* something. Let’s turn to the Sermon on the Mount for clarity on what that something is.

The Inaugural Address and How to Play Bach

The Gospel of Matthew is structured around five major blocks of teaching. Each block is a sermon or collection of sermons straight from the mouth of Jesus and ends with the saying “when Jesus had finished speaking” at Matthew 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, and 26:1. The first teaching block is the Sermon the Mount, spanning the entirety of chapters 5-7.

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus’ inaugural address. In our time, a new President fresh from swearing-in delivers an inaugural address as a way of communicating what their four-year team will be about. Inauguration day is supposed to announce the *beginning* of the term and *clarity* about the new President’s agenda. We can tell from the inaugural address what kind of person we have to deal with for four years and what we can expect from them.

Before inauguration day, the candidate will have hit the campaign trail and given us a glimpse into who they are. Jesus does the same before the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus began his teaching and healing ministry in the small villages around the Sea of Galilee. He preached his first sermon on the campaign trail: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matthew 4:17). He called his first disciples: Simon and his brother Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. These four men closed up their fishing businesses,

turned their backs on the only life they'd ever known, and "followed" Jesus (4:22). Jesus "went throughout Galilee," walking from town to town, teaching in the synagogues and curing people's bodies of actual physical, mental, and spiritual diseases, and as a result, huge crowds of people started "following" him (4:22-25).

The Sermon on the Mount marks Inauguration Day, where Jesus begins his public ministry and makes it clear what his intentions are and what he expects his followers to do. The thing that prompts the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus "saw the crowds" (5:1). We can't know how large these crowds were, but it's clear they were sufficiently huge enough to alert Jesus that it was time to organize his following into two groups: the "crowds" and the "disciples." Jesus "saw" the crowds, but the crowds don't follow him when he goes up the mountain. Only the disciples follow Jesus up the mountain, and only the disciples hear the Sermon on the Mount. The crowds elect to stay at the bottom of the mountain, out of earshot of the inaugural address.

Let's notice two things about Jesus choosing to go up a mountain. First, Jesus mirrors Moses. Moses was the giver of the law to the Israelites, having received the law straight from the mouth of God. Moses climbed to the top of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:20) to hear God dictate the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law. It was Moses' job to listen to God's instructions and deliver those instructions back to the Israelites, who were camped at the foot of the mountain. All the Israelites heard was thunder from the top of the mountain. It was Moses who heard God's words.

Jesus is like Moses in that Jesus climbs a mountain and gives us a new sort of law. This law isn't a legal code where, if you don't obey the rules, God will smite you. Rather, this "law" is a code of conduct for followers of Jesus.

What makes the law of Moses different from the Sermon on the Mount is the difference between a catalog of rules and a portrait of character. The law of Moses is a catalog or list of rules. The 613 commandments of the law meant, "Here's what you do and here's what you don't do. Follow the rules if you want to remain in good standing with God."

On the other hand, the Sermon on the Mount is a portrait of character. Jesus is painting a picture with words as a master preacher would. The picture he's painting is a way of being in the

world, a type of person we can and will become if we take the preacher seriously and apply the lifestyle he's describing. While the law of Moses is *prescriptive*, as in, a prescription of what exactly you should and should not do, the Sermon on the Mount, and indeed the rest of Jesus' teachings, are *redemptive*, meaning, here is a picture of the sort of life a redeemed person lives, and in living this life, you are both redeemed yourself and, by God's grace, a redeemer of others. Where the law of Moses is a legal code of do's and don'ts, the Sermon on the Mount is a code of conduct for the kind of life Jesus expects of his followers.

Second, the disciples self-select to be disciples. The first time the word "disciple" appears in Matthew is here in Matthew 5:1. Before this, all of Jesus' followers are simply that, followers in the crowd. When Jesus climbs the mountain, what he *doesn't* do is pick and choose who will be a disciple and who will be part of the crowd. Instead, every follower of Jesus is given a choice: will I remain with the crowd, or will I go to where Jesus is? A section of the crowd opts-in on their own free will to climb the mountain and be with Jesus. Matthew calls this group "disciples."

So far, we haven't really defined what a "disciple" is. The word "disciple" in English is the word *mathétēs* in Matthew's original Greek. Notice how similar the word *mathétēs* is to the original Greek word for Matthew, *Matthaios*. While the Gospel of Matthew is traditionally named after the apostle Matthew, the tax-collector who quit his job to follow Jesus (Matthew 9:9), the author of Matthew never actually names himself. It could be the title "Matthew" is a play on words of the word *mathétēs*, as if the Gospel were actually titled "Disciple," since the theme of discipleship is such a big deal in Matthew.

A disciple is a student, but the kind of student that imitates the instructor. More than learning content, curriculum, and subject matter, the disciple wants to learn the character of the instructor, who they are and what makes them, *them*, with the goal of becoming like the instructor and essentially *being* the instructor in the eyes of others. This kind of instructor is more like a coach who imparts their character and wisdom onto the student, and this kind of student is more like an apprentice who learns how to do what the master does and how be the kind of person the master is.

I have a vivid childhood memory of a potter sitting at his potter wheel. My parents took me to the North Carolina state fair, and one of the exhibits was a live demonstration of a potter making new ceramic vases out of raw clay. As he powered the potter wheel with his foot and shaped the clay with his muddy hands, he gave a lecture to passersby. “Kids these days are being cheated out of learning things like this. We ask them to memorize stuff, then spit out the stuff on a piece of paper, and we call that ‘learning.’ They don’t know what it’s like to be an apprentice. An apprentice doesn’t regurgitate knowledge. An apprentice learns an art by doing the art under someone who’s mastered the art. We need fewer regurgitators and more apprentices.”

I’m no educator, but I think the potter was right about something. Learning something, really and truly learning, requires apprenticeship. This is the kind of learning of a disciple. The disciple learns a way of life by doing a way of life under the Master who has mastered the way of life.

Who climbs the mountain to be with Jesus? The apprentices. The people who want coaching. Those who want to be lifelong learners under a master teacher. Those who want to pattern their lives after a coach. Those who learn *to* imitate Jesus *by* imitating Jesus.

Eventually, every follower of Jesus has to make a choice: Am I satisfied with being part of the crowd? Or do I want to be a disciple of the coach? There are some people who find it’s enough simply to be part of the crowd. These are the people who likely won’t take a leadership role at church. They show up to worship on Christmas and Easter, or maybe once a month but prefer to remain anonymous. They’re not interested in a small group. They may sign up to volunteer at church or in the community, but they’re volunteering for a task, not joining a people. Like dipping your toe in the water instead of jumping all-in, these folks prefer to stay on shore rather than dive head-first into a life of discipleship.

That’s okay. There’s no judgement here. Jesus never judges the crowd for being the crowd. Ever. Jesus has nothing but love for the crowd. But there is something the crowd is missing: training. A disciple *trains* in the way of Jesus. A disciple studies under the coach, does what the coach would do, and keeps going back to the coach. But folks in the crowd by definition aren’t in training. They’re *trying* to be like Jesus but without the head-first commitment of a lifelong apprenticeship.

Trying at something may sound easier. Trying doesn't require much time, effort, or discipline. Trying at something doesn't require that you change your life in order to accomplish your goal. Training sure sounds harder, like a lot of work. Pastor John Ortberg reflects on the difference between trying and training:

Respecting the distinction between training and merely trying is the key to transformation in every aspect of life. People sometimes think that learning how to play Bach at the keyboard by spending years practicing scales and chord progressions is the "hard" way. The truth is the other way around. Spending years practicing scales is the easy way to learn to play Bach. Imagine sitting down at a grand piano in front of a packed concert hall and having never practiced a moment in your life. That's the hard way.¹

Matthew wants us to be like Jesus the easy way, and the easy way is to become a disciple. A disciple trains at being like Jesus through lifelong studying under Jesus. There's no guilt or shame for being a tryer, a part of the crowd, but staying in the crowd is signing ourselves up for the hard way of being like Jesus. The easy way is to climb the mountain and sit at Jesus' feet.

The Blessed Life?

Already we've used the phrase "be like Jesus," but what does that mean? Let's follow the disciples up the mountain, because that's the question they want answered, too.

Jesus gives us nine descriptions of the life he calls "blessed." The number nine is significant in that it's one less than ten, as in the Ten Commandments. Jesus is reinterpreting the Ten Commandments for a new day without full-out replacing them, hence why he stops short at the number ten.

The word "blessed" is *makarios* and could be translated as "happy." Jesus is saying, "These people are the happy people." He *doesn't* prescribe a list of tips on how to be a happier person. He's not prescribing but making statements of facts. "These are the happy people and that's the way it is." By simply laying out statements of who the happy people are, Jesus challenges us to find ourselves in these people, or not. We're either part of the happy bunch, or

¹ <https://faithgateway.com/blogs/christian-books/training-vs-trying>

we're not. We're meant to reflect inward on whether we're becoming like the people Jesus says are living the happy life.

The Beatitudes are a shocking list.

1. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). The happy people are the opposite of proud, arrogant, and large-and-in-charge. The happy are those who are gentle. The harshness of life, rather than making these people harder, has made them gentler, more tender to others, and open-handed to give and receive love. Their poverty of spirit is clear in their posture of gentleness. These people already possess the Kingdom of Heaven, or God's dream for the world.
2. "Blessed are those who mourn" (Matthew 5:4). Jesus gets practical here. We may count ourselves as the happiest of people when we're grieving, and for a practical reason: when we're grieving, we're on the receiving end of comfort, the beneficiaries of care and attention at a time when we desperately need them.
3. "Blessed are the meek" (Matthew 5:5). Only the humble are happy. The reverse is also true. All the arrogant are sad. Only the humble will receive God's good intentions for the world.
4. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6). The happy life is a life of vocation where we chase God's righteous causes in the world as if the chase were bread and water to us.
5. "Blessed are the merciful" (Matthew 5:7). Mercy is choosing to be kind when it is in your power to be cruel. The happiest of people choose to wield their influence over others in ways best described as "kind," never as cruel. It's the merciful who will receive mercy when it's their turn to be on the receiving end.
6. "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8). The pure of heart have nothing to hide from God. They have laid their hearts bare to God so that God can see the dust and grime we'd much prefer to hide. It is in making ourselves vulnerable to being known by God that we see God ourselves.
7. "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9). The word for "peacemaker" means one who embodies peace. The happy people are those who become islands of peace when they're

surrounded on all sides by hate, cruelty, and meanness. All people are God's children, of course, but only the peacemakers will be "called" God's children by reputation. They'll be known the world over as reflections of the God of peace.

8. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matthew 5:10). The happy folks are those who paid the price for standing up for what is right. These people chose the right way over the feel-good way, the easy-going way, or the people-pleasing way. These people are living as citizens *now* of God's *future* then.

9 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." (Matthew 5:11). Happy are the people who shine Jesus to the world in word, deed, and being, and take the heat for it. Jesus uses the word "when," not "if." It's inevitable that we'll take the heat for being like Jesus, and when we do, we're living the happiest life there is.

Taken together, the Beatitudes look like the *unhappy* life. Grief, persecution, confession of the heart, suffering for what is right, it all sounds hard and painful. That's because it is. But just because it's hard doesn't make it less happy.

There's a song by the singer Pharrell Williams called *Happy*. It's catchy and I love it, but the Beatitudes disagree with it. Here's a stanza:

Here come bad news talking this and that
Yeah, well, gimme all you got and don't hold back
Yeah, well I should probably warn you I'll be just fine
Yeah, no offense to you don't waste your time
Here's why

Because I'm happy.²

The concept of happiness in the song is the dominant assumption of happiness in our culture, and it's that happiness equates to pleasure. It's easy to equate happiness with the feel-good vibes of pleasure. We usually take one of two routes to arrive at pleasure. We can take the

² Pharrell Williams, *Happy*.

ignoring path where we close our ears to the bad news and suffering around us (as the song would have us do), or the *indulgence* path where we chase the stuff that will give us temporary pleasure like possessions, trips, money, approval, success, and positive vibes.

But happiness is not pleasure. According to the Sermon on the Mount, happiness is the *inside-out* path where a person has a change of heart on the inside, a change that leads to becoming poor of spirit, humble, and brave, and that inner change translates to outer change where we give ourselves way to God's causes of mercy, peace, and righteousness. Will this kind of life lead to pleasure? Sometimes. But it will involve the good kind of pain, too, the pain of sacrifice and living *for* others.

Jesus says we are to be "salt" and "light" in the world (Matthew 5:13-14). The world is often tasteless because it doesn't have people who know what true happiness is, the inside-out happiness defined by the Beatitudes. The world is tasteless when people don't practice the life Jesus called blessed! Jesus' followers are to flavor a bland world with real inside-out happiness. The world is often dark, too, but Jesus' followers are to be the light in the darkness. Here again, Jesus doesn't tell us *how* to be salt and light. He says we *are* salt and light. That means if we're not being salt and light, then we're not following Jesus. We may know him, but that doesn't mean we're following him.

Jesus captures the idea of inside-out happiness in his image of the city on a hill (Matthew 5:14-16). The city on the hill exists *for* the people outside of the city. In the same way, disciples of Jesus practice good works for the benefit of others, so that others might benefit from these good works and give glory to God. The change of heart on the inside leads to unselfish acts of love on the outside.

Years ago, an eighth-grade-student, let's call him Brian, walked across the street from his middle school to a convenience store only a block away from my church. Brian bought a cookie from the convenience store. Another student had walked to the same convenience store and demanded Brian give him his cookie. Brian said no. There was pushing, there was shoving, there was a fight, then there was a knife, and Brian didn't make it out alive. All over a cookie.

My church held a prayer vigil for Brian in our sanctuary. I thought maybe a dozen people would show up. Before the vigil ever started, the place was packed, standing room only. Brian's classmates, his teachers, and church members who never knew him all showed up. The prayer vigil lasted thirty minutes or so, then we all marched out of the sanctuary. We walked down the sidewalk and stopped at the convenience store. On the way out of the sanctuary, everyone was given a candle, one of the leftover candles from Christmas Eve. We lit the candles outside the convenience store and held them up, and together we pushed back the darkness.

Could the candles bring Brian back? No. The light can't cancel the darkness; the light can push back the darkness. Did I ever see the folks who weren't church members visit our church on a Sunday? No. But a light doesn't exist for itself. The light exists for others, so they might make their way through the dark.

In the same way, disciples of Jesus *are* light in a dark world. We can't delete the dark, but we sure can push it back. We don't shine the light for own benefit. We shine *for* others. We model Jesus for them and give them a good reason to praise God. Those who see our light will learn what kind of lifestyle God hopes we would live, and hopefully, they will praise God more than we ever did.

The Law Fulfilled

The rest of the Sermon of the Mount is Jesus reinterpreting how to be religious.

Yes, I said "religious." The R-word gets a bad rap, and for good reason. The institutions of religion have been the culprits of horrendous acts of violence and evil systems of injustice. Also, it's not religion that saves us and makes us right with God. God is the savior, not religion. God saves us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus *apart from* the works of religion.

But Jesus isn't an unreligious person. Following Jesus doesn't mean abandoning all religion, nor does it mean embracing religion for religion's sake. What Jesus offers the world is a new way of being religious. We don't even have to call this new way "religion" or "being religious," and maybe we shouldn't because Matthew never uses those words. We can simply call it "following Jesus" or "being a disciple."

The religion that Jesus reinterprets is Judaism. We must remember that Jesus lived and died as a Jew, all of the first disciples were Jewish, and the good news of his resurrection first spread to people from Jewish families. Jesus was the Messiah, which was a Jewish idea for the chosen king of God's own anointing (the word Messiah means "anointed one"). This king's reign would usher in a never-ending age of peace and prosperity for Israel. Matthew understands Jesus *is* this king. He begins his Gospel with the words, "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the *Messiah* (Matthew 1:1). In other words, Matthew wants his readers to know there's no taking the Jewishness out of the Jesus. For this reason, the early church placed Matthew in a strategic location in the Bible as the bridge between the Old and New Testaments, linking the people of Israel to the people of the body of Christ.

The scholarly consensus is that Matthew wrote this Gospel for the house church of the city of Antioch in the Roman province of Syria, sometime in the last quarter of the first century AD. This congregation was made of Jewish Christians who were struggling to articulate their faith in a uniquely Jewish Messiah to the growing number of Gentile, or non-Jewish, Christians. One of Matthew's aims is to explain that Jesus is very much a Jew, sent as God's chosen king of the Jews for the salvation of the Jews, and that the Jesus movement is the fulfillment of Jewish faith in God and the relaunch of the nation of Israel.

In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus tells the disciples he hasn't come to "abolish" or erase the Jewish law. Far from it. Jesus wants to "fulfill" the law, meaning, Jesus has come to teach the world what the faith of Israel, and indeed all religion, was *for* in the first place. Jesus wants us to practice the heart or intent of religion as he understands it, with the result that followers of Jesus are "more righteous" than the strictest of Jews, the scribes and Pharisees. The "new way of being religious" according to Jesus isn't about abiding by the rules of religion; it's about imitating someone's style as he practiced the true meaning of religion.

I'm an amateur chess player. That means I enjoy losing badly on the rare occasion I play chess. One time, I lost to a preteen about a third my age named James. James is the son of two of my best friends. James beat me so badly, I wanted to know who taught him chess. Imagine this mystery teacher had figured out the absolute best way to play chess. This teacher could not be defeated because they, alone of all chess players, understood the game to the fullest possible

extent. If I wanted to learn chess from this grand master, I'd have to learn their style. Learning the rules of the game wouldn't cut it. I'd have to learn the *way* they played the game, not "what" they do but "how" they do it.

Following Jesus means imitating his style of practicing faith in God. It's not about the rules. Like learning from a chess master, it's about learning the *way* this person plays the game, and the game here is living as God intended us to live. Jesus, alone of all people in history, understood the game of life to the fullest possible extent. It's our task to imitate his style.

In Matthew 5:17-48, Jesus lifts up six teachings from the tradition of Israel, reinterprets them, and makes them stricter. For each teaching, Jesus says a version of, "You have heard it was said... But I say to you." For example, "You have heard it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28). Jesus drills down deeper, below the surface meaning of what the law of Moses or Jewish tradition said, and lifts up the heart or intent of the teaching as the *actual* teaching that followers of Jesus must do. Followers of Jesus evict lust from their hearts, and in so doing, they're not adulterers. Following Jesus is harder than following the letter of the Jewish law because Jesus expects his followers to practice the underlying meaning, or heart, of the law as he interprets it.

In Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus essentially says, "Don't be like those people." We all know religious types we don't want to be like. Jesus doesn't want us to be like those people, either. Don't be like people who give to charity for the sake of being seen; instead, give to the poor and do it in secret. Don't be like people who pray so others can hear them praying; instead, pray simply and quietly, following the pattern of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Don't fast so others can see you being holier-than-thou; instead, fast without anyone knowing you're fasting, because the point of all religion is to return to God, not to earn social status.

In Matthew 6:19-7:6, Jesus tells how *not* to do religion. Don't stockpile money when it could benefit "heavenly" work, or the causes of God on earth. Don't give your entire attention to the darkness of the world or you'll get lost in it and become part of the darkness yourself. Don't even try at serving God and money at the same time because it's impossible. Don't worry about having enough or running out of resources when you're living out God's call on your life. Don't

judge people unless you want the very same people to judge you for being a hypocrite, someone who doesn't practice what they preach.

In Matthew 7:7-23, Jesus gives us six images of what "being religious" should look like. It appreciates the holy and sacred. It prays honestly and openly to God like a child asking their dad for lunch. It practices "do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). It's the narrow way, not the popular or convenient way. It bears good fruit, or positive impact on the world. It "does" the will of God instead of being hearers only.

"These Words of Mine"

Jesus closes the Sermon on the Mount with an illustration of two men, one who builds a house on sand, and one who builds on rock (Matthew 7:24-28). The one who builds on sand "hears these words of mine [Jesus] and does not act on them," and the house falls apart. The one who builds on rock "hears these words of mine and acts on them."

What does Coaching Under the Master mean? It means listening to the coach and following through with what you heard. It means *doing* faith in the style of Jesus. Don't stop of hearing. Doing faith in the way of Jesus requires training under him, a lifestyle of learning *to* imitate Jesus *by* imitating Jesus.

One day, I took up woodworking on a whim. I had a vision of an outdoor exercise structure made of wood and steel, a do-it-yourself outdoor gym. There would be a pull-up bar and two parallel bars for doing tricep dips. I saw a structure like this on a running trail and thought, "That doesn't look too hard."

I found a website with a sketch of what I wanted to build. I went to the hardware store and bought the wood beams and steel pipes. My father-in-law had given me a circular saw the previous Christmas, which I had never touched. I dusted off my measuring tape, hooked up the saw, found my power drill, and started cutting the wood and steel. It was loud and sweaty work, but I enjoyed it. I assembled the pieces the way the sketch told me. I had my finished product, my very own wood-and-steel outdoor gym. I jumped up and took hold of the pull-up bar for my first pull-up.

You know what happened. The entire thing collapsed like a Jenga puzzle. I put the pieces back together, tried another pull-up, and this time the structure held. But one more pull-up was asking too much of it. The structure collapsed again, and this time I knew I couldn't fix it. My wife came home, saw the wooden beams and lengths of steel fence posts on her back deck, and shook her head. She knew I had never worked with these materials in my life.

I failed because I hadn't taken the time or effort to apprentice under someone who knew what they were doing. I tried but I hadn't trained. The life of following Jesus is a life of apprenticeship like a trainee carpenter training under a master. We're to learn Jesus, practice Jesus, and repeat Jesus, over and over again. The disciple *does* Jesus in the world, and in the process, becomes like Jesus. That is building a house on rock.

Leader Guide

Ask someone to read Matthew 5:1-20. Ask if there are any initial questions or inspirations in reaction to the text.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What were the seasons in your life when you experienced the most growth? Who were your coaches in your that season? What made them a great coach?
2. Why is it important that Jesus values the *character* of who we're becoming over the *content* of knowing the rules and information about our faith?
3. How is Jesus like Moses in the Sermon on the Mount and why is the comparison important for Matthew?
4. When in your life were you part of the crowd following Jesus? When were you a disciple? What are the differences between being part of the crowd and being a disciple?
5. When have you been an apprentice under someone, and how was the experience of apprenticeship like being a follower of Jesus?
6. What does it mean for Jesus to teach us a "new way of being religious?"
7. What are the parts of the religious life you love? What parts of religion make you cringe?
8. How do you understand the difference between these three approaches to happiness- the ignoring way, the indulgence way, and the inside-out way?
9. What does Jesus mean he says he's come to fulfill the law rather than abolish it?
10. As you look ahead in your life, in what ways would you like to be a doer of Jesus rather than a hearer only?