

PLUNDERING THE TREASURE TROVE

A Life Group Discussion Guide for “The Sermon on the Mount” as translated in *A FAR BETTER LIFE*

by
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My Dear friend,

I have been absorbing, studying, writing and talking about this sermon for a decade now. I really haven't been able to seriously work on much else the whole while, because what I see in this sermon lifts me up like nothing else. There must be a way to help other people see what I see. I hope that this discussion guide will stir within you a deeper desire to find the beauty that abounds in this sermon, and that it will open you anew to the richness of listening to Jesus.

As a psychologist I have been integrating these ideas from Jesus into my work as I help people. *A Far Better Life* explains how that works for me. Part 1 of the book uncovers Jesus' message, and Part 2 applies it to Christian Counseling. Even though this book comes from a psychologist's perspective, I have come to see that “these ideas from Jesus” are for everybody – not only for people interested in Christian Counseling. The feedback I am getting tells me that people who read the book want to spend most of their time talking about Chapter 2, which is a translation of “The Sermon on the Mount.” People also want to talk about the final chapter, “Lessons about Healing Hearts”, but they keep coming back to the second chapter. That is why I have chosen to limit this guide to that chapter. It contains the precious treasure for us all, in and out of Christian Counseling.

Once I began translating this sermon, I could not stop re-working the ideas and scrutinizing just what He was saying. The message was almost too good to be true. Jesus' words kept ringing in my ears, and I kept coming back to the sermon, continually finding new gems. People who have discussed this material in group settings have told me that they keep coming back to particular gems too, time and again, in subsequent meetings, which suggests that they are having the same reaction as mine. Jesus' ideas are refreshing and clear, and will not be dismissed. I have not found anything that even comes close. This sermon reached out and

grabbed me, starting with “The Beatitudes”, and Jesus drew me closer to Himself, the closer I got to this sermon. It is the most important three chapters in the most important book of all time. Please pardon all of these clichés! It’s a gusher, a goldmine, a pinnacle – let’s just call it “The Treasure Trove.”

You will find your own pearls of wisdom as you enter into this sermon’s study, but let me point out two among many gems that will surely enrich your life:

1. “The Kingdom of the Heavens” means that the Father is right by your side, ready to help you with any problem, any time you call on Him.
2. “The Beatitudes” assure you that God will help you in the worst of times.

The Setting

Shortly after being baptized, Jesus began His ministry by speaking in some of the local villages. Lives were touched right away. His crystal clear message reached people’s hearts. His first sermons in those settings were not recorded in full, but we have this “nutshell version” in *Matthew 4:19*.

You can turn your life around because *the Kingdom of the Heavens* is at hand. The Father is right beside you, available to help you with any problem that comes up. (The wording and the meaning of this teaching are discussed in *A Far Better Life*, page 9.)

That hope-bearing message was solid gold. His audience was ready to listen to anything else He had to say, if that much was true. They flocked to hear His subsequent messages, eager to hear Him because this message changed their lives on the spot.

As we find in the first chapter of *A Far Better Life*, that message is a gleaming gem because of the term, “The Kingdom of the Heavens.” To them, “heavens”, plural, meant “the air around you; your living space.” This told people to invite the Father into their living space. Jesus was saying that His kingdom is wherever they may be. He will be in control anywhere if He is invited. “Call on the Father. He is close at hand.” How completely simple that is, yet how rich.

Please keep in mind that this teaching was attracting widespread attention before He delivered “The Sermon on the Mount.” Actually, its immediate, helpful effect is why so many folks followed Him. People were strongly drawn to the idea that the creator of the universe is “at hand”, ready to be a caring Father. People came from every remote village in the region to listen to the teacher with that rich, life-changing message. They followed Him up the mountainside where they heard this sermon. They had already taken a preliminary glimpse at His first gem, and as the sermon

proceeded, He came back to use it time and again. In fact, this gem makes the whole sermon come to life – The Father is available to help each of us bring these teachings to life in our daily walk. What gem could be more valuable?

It would be great to do some time travel, and go back to hear the full, word-for-word presentations of His earliest messages. He must have said quite a bit more than is recorded in the “nutshell version” that we have in Matthew’s account. During those first sermons it must have been completely captivating to see His facial expression, hear His voice inflection and discover how He used everyday language.

A time traveler would also want to hear the entire “Sermon on the Mount”, complete with all of the examples and connecting points which are unrecorded. What we have in *Matthew* is an outline of what He said that day, certainly not the entire sermon. In this discussion group you will get to look at “The Sermon on the Mount” in its outline form. This is the way that Jesus’ listeners remembered the sermon. Those times were much different for dedicated learners. People did not have pencils, papers, recorders or power point projectors, and there were no news broadcasts or magazines to help them remember His highlighted points. Jesus’ listeners used mental outlines as memory aids. Jesus, along with the other teachers from His time, would arrange their comments in this fashion, in order to help listeners remember the major points. That is like some preachers and sermons today, who print out key sermon ideas in the Sunday program, complete with blank spaces, so that the listeners will be able to fill them in, as a memory aide. As you will see, the “outline approach” shows the flow of ideas from the original sermon.

Here is more about how outlines were used back then. They emphasized the main point by placing it in the center, not at the end, and the sub-points lined up before and after it. So just what, exactly, is the main point – the climax – of this sermon? “The Lord’s Prayer.” If that is true, then what does that suggest about the rest of the sermon?

1. “The Lord’s Prayer” is one of the sermon’s gems. It summarizes the entire sermon.
2. The first half of the sermon shows how wounds keep us distant from the Father, and block His entry into our life. Wounds block our prayers. We are only able to pray “The Lord’s Prayer” with our whole heart if those wounds receive some help.
3. Both halves of the sermon provide details about what it takes to turn every area of our life over to Him, which is a major theme of “The Lord’s Prayer.”
4. The closing point of the sermon, about the house in the storm, lines up with the sermon’s opening teaching, “The Beatitudes”. A fresh look at this gem reveals

that “The Beatitudes” reassure us that the Father will be with us during the hardest of times, which is also what the “house in the storm” passage suggests.

5. The wounds identified in the sermon’s first half need to be taken care of so that the family-of-God traits, mentioned in the second half, can direct our lives. Wounds make it harder to put the teachings in the second half into practice. Both halves point to the climax – “Talk everything over with the Father – healing the wounds that can keep you stuck, and developing Family-of-God traits.”
6. Here is another gem: The sermon’s second half shows us what our character will look like when we live in the family of God.

As you can see, this approach presents “The Sermon on the Mount” in a completely different light than most people are accustomed to. Instead of taking this sermon as a collection of His teachings about many topics, including prayer, this outline suggests that the sermon is carefully organized, from start to finish, in a way that listeners could easily remember. Everything points to overcoming wounds, to prayer and to developing lives which tell the world we are in the family of God.

I believe that “The Sermon on the Mount” is actually an expansion of the earlier sermons – those “nutshelled” in the chapter ahead of this sermon. For you time travelers, in case you don’t get back there to hear Jesus’ earliest sermons in their complete rendition, I believe that it is close enough for you to read “The Sermon on the Mount.” You will find that this sermon most eloquently expresses the mature development of the seeds from the early sermons. *When Jesus first urged people to turn their lives around by inviting the Father into their living space, (from the earlier sermons) they may have not known how to do that. This sermon makes that crystal clear.*

A Brief Outline of “The Sermon on the Mount”

Keep these points in mind when you study this outline. The first and last points (1 and 1’) are related, points in the middle of each half (2 and 2’) also are related, and the main point (3) is in the middle. Here is how those points line up.

1. Trust that the Father will be there to help you during hard times.
 2. Let Him help with your heart wounds, so you will not live from your hurt.
 3. Put the Father first, and talk everything over with Him. Get His power and guidance into every area of your life.

2'. Seek His guidance to develop His family traits, and to live from a heart shaped by Him.

1'. Let this sermon guide your actions, and you will do well during the hardest times.

A More Detailed Outline

1. "The Beatitudes" (*Matthew 5:3-12*). The Father will be with you during the hardest of times, particularly when you are spiritually broken, overcome with sadness, treated unfairly, trying to live correctly, seriously drained from being merciful, deeply longing to stay pure, overmatched in your peacemaking efforts and when you are persecuted because you follow Jesus. Because He is with you, you will find yourself full of joy. Invite Him into your living space, and you will enter into the Kingdom of the Heavens.

2. You don't have to let your life be guided by your hurt. Wounds can control your heart when they bring up hopelessness, contempt, lust, dishonesty, retaliation and false righteousness (*Matthew 5:13-6:6*). In each of these, Jesus stresses it is crucial to win the battle at the heart level, or it will surely be lost. "Taking care of these wounds" is often what we think of when we speak of "healing." Jesus does not spell out exactly how this happens, apart from continually seeking the Father's guidance.

3. "The Lord's Prayer" (*Matthew 6:7-13*). Talk everything over with the Father. In everything, He is to be honored. Invite Him to take control of every area in your life, just as He is in control of Heaven, to help you keep your heart prioritized (to deal with worry, forgiveness, lust and dishonesty), and to live each day from your heart instead of from your hurt. (The underlined final clause summarizes the rest of the sermon.)

2'. When hurt no longer clogs up your heart, the Father will be right there to guide you to live from your transformed heart. He will bring these characteristics into your daily life – forgiveness, genuineness, peacefulness, loving relationships and sincerity. These will declare to everyone who your Father is (*Matthew 6:14-7:23*).

1'. Building your life on this sermon is like building your house on a rock. During the hardest of times He will be with you, and you will withstand any storm. But be very clear about one thing – hearing this sermon is not enough. Only when it directs your life, will you be able to withstand the force of any storm. Without His guidance and power, you will face certain destruction (*Matthew 7:24-27*).

Topics for Group Discussions about “The Sermon on the Mount”

1. The Father in Your Living Space – Jesus Stirs Excitement throughout the Countryside
2. An Overview of “The Sermon on the Mount”, from the Vantage Point of “The Lord's Prayer”
3. The Hardest of Times – “The Beatitudes” and the Storms that Can Destroy You
4. Hopelessness, Peacefulness and Your Heart
5. Contempt, Loving Relationships and Your Heart
6. Lust, Loving Relationships and Your Heart
7. Dishonesty, Genuineness and Your Heart
8. Retaliation, Forgiveness and Your Heart
9. False Righteousness, Sincerity and Your Heart
10. Living in The Father's Family

Guidelines for Running the Groups

My preference is to open with some worship music, and end with 15 – 30 minutes of prayer. Groups of any size can use these guidelines. The key for each meeting is to find how to keep every person involved, so they can get exactly what God has for them. Whenever groups are larger than eight people it becomes hard for everyone to stay involved. For groups larger than eight, I try to break people up for a part of the time into smaller groups, not more than four people in each, so that every person can get into the discussion.

You will find Opening Questions for each meeting that can be shared in a group of any size. Not every question needs to be discussed, but take 10 to 15 minutes with them, getting people involved. Leaders, please do not feel contained by these questions. Feel free to introduce questions of your own, to cover the material, as you feel led. The Small Group Questions are best handled by separating people into groups no bigger than four, because in groups of that size everyone can be candid about their personal responses. Here is a tip: Split up couples and close friends into different groups. That breaks patterns of silence. The Small Group questions can take from 30 to 45 minutes. In larger groups it is hard to create a process that is intimate enough. Every individual will have feelings which emerge during the meeting, so breaking up into small groups is one way to insure that people will be able to get their feelings out and to have them supported. It is precisely there – in groups of four or less – that the family of God process can emerge. When the small groups get back together at the end of the meeting, people want to share just what they discussed, and the process can become more family-like than ever. Prayer time at the end tends to go deeper when people get back together from the smaller groups, than it does for meetings that omit splitting into smaller groups.

Try to set aside some time to read the material ahead of time. These ten sessions are based on the first three chapters in *A Far Better Life*, so you will want to become familiar with those chapters. If you do not read the particular section ahead of time, please do not miss a meeting. You will still be able to join in the group process, because the content is not complicated, and the book's page numbers are included for most of the specific questions. Whatever you learn in these discussions should be shared so that it can come right into your life. People need to get a warm "family of God" reception at each meeting so they will have a chance to speak from their heart. This is the process that we are hoping to create. Try to have some snacks ready at the end, because this tends to bring people's walls down, and encourages them to open up as much as they are able. If people have opened up their feelings during the discussion, it helps to have some informal, chatting time at the end to gradually bring the process to a close.

A Key Idea: One person told me that he has never been able to turn his life completely over to God, and that has caused him great anguish. In his case, hopelessness and alcoholism persisted despite his best efforts to get Christian help. I briefly explained the first "gem", about the Father in our living space, and even though he had been a Christian for years, that really opened his eyes. Then we went on to discuss ideas from meeting #4 in this discussion guide, which is about hopelessness. Here is the key for this man: He needs to seek the Father's guidance and power each time he considers drinking alcohol. That is where he comes to a crossroad moment. "Am I going to go this way or that?" We went over the previous time he had been drinking too much, and identified the hopeless part of him. After prayer for healing the hopelessness, he had more faith that the first gem could work. He was very relieved to know that this is how to turn every area of your life over to God – each time you have a problem, turn it over to Him right then and there. Each problem that is overcome gets God into one more area of his life.

It is not as though a person can just do it all at once, as he had believed. Getting the Father into every area of life involves character building. It takes time and it takes a plan. The plan is to welcome the Father into every moment when hurts come up. That clears out the blockages that stop a person from living from their heart. Gems make the plan easier to follow.

Welcome to a fresh look at "The Sermon on the Mount." Expect to find life-changing gems, and let the plundering begin. Hold onto as many gems as you can find. Jesus created them for you.

Meeting 1: The Father in Your Living Space – Jesus Stirs Excitement throughout the Countryside

Please reflect on how complicated translating this sermon is. We are two thousand years away, and the profound difference between cultures creates a challenge. Translators work very hard to get from there to here. They take into account that Jesus was speaking in the *Aramaic* language, that what we have are translations of His words as they were recorded in an early form of Greek, that we don't have the original Greek manuscripts among hundreds of early copies, and that there are already many English translations to look at. It is a rigorous, scientific study of words, on the one hand, and yet it is a creative effort to bring out ideas and visions in a fashion that conveys the literary richness of the original message. We are not simply asking which words were used. We are seeking to enter into the Master's frame of mind, as He developed His message. A few of His words could open up vast vistas of meaning to you, in powerful, new ways. Expect that to happen in this and in each session.

Let's take one of His ideas. It is a gem, if there is such a thing as a gem. This point is covered in *A Far Better Life's* opening chapter, and it is our starting point. This is a huge departure from customary thinking. Jesus did not refer, at least in this text, to a "Kingdom of Heaven", as though He were going to promote such an establishment. Stop thinking that this term has any place in the sermon. The term that He actually used each time was, the "Kingdom of the Heavens." The Greek text makes that very clear, and it stuns me that most English translations give us the wrong wording. That particular wording puts Jesus' teaching in a completely different light. "Heavens" means "the air around you – your living space." Let this sink in. Jesus was conveying a grand vista of paramount theological meaning when He chose to use the plural form of "heaven." His listeners got it right away – this sermon is about getting the Father's guidance and power into their life. He turned the countryside on its ear by simply using that phrasing.

One other translation up-grade will be necessary to catch the power of Jesus' message here. "Repent" means, "to turn your life around. Start moving in the opposite direction." Jesus was instilling hope in His listeners. "No matter how bad your life is right now, the Father will help you turn your life around." Jesus was inviting people to take Him at His word. "You will be able to do this with the Father's help."

He was not saying that His Kingdom is someday going to be an establishment of some sort. He was saying that His Kingdom will be wherever we are if we ask Him to join us. He will rule in your living space. He is completely ready to join you, in power and wisdom as soon as you call on Him. Thank you, Jesus, if that is all you have to say. That is plenty. But what incredibly impactful meaning those few words convey! The Father is available to help you with any problem that comes up. His words get us started, but it

is through discussing it and then getting the Father's guidance in our daily life that we get to know what Jesus really meant.

Here is an interesting note for you armchair theologians. A popular way of describing "salvation", and one that I surely believe is quite accurate, is to call it "establishing a relationship with God." Jesus did not exactly use those words, but we find that everything He said points that direction. "Establishing a relationship with God" is a good way to tell people in our culture what "salvation" is. Here is the interesting part. Jesus' revolutionary teaching was "the Father is ready to help you in your living space, so call on Him at any time." Is that about "establishing a relationship with God", or what? Jesus' wording was a great way to tell people how to establish a relationship with God. Even though that much is true, "the Kingdom of the Heavens" is an inspiring, challenging and hopeful way to talk about a relationship with God. If His Kingdom is wherever I am, that makes a difference all of the time. We can see that this approach to establishing a relationship with the Father calls upon us to take an active part, and not just let "the relationship" remain an abstract notion that has not power in our life.

In case any of you armchair theologians are still in doubt whether this understanding of the "kingdom of the heavens" holds any weight, please consider this: The Bible is a series of stories about people who were in some sort of trouble. When they invited God to help them, He came through, big time. It makes tons of sense to me that this particular teaching is a great "one line summary" for the entire Bible: *You can turn your life around by welcoming the Father into your living space.* How perfect a fit it is for Jesus to make His entry onto the religious scene with that teaching! It was His starting point, and it became His central point, one that He kept coming back to, time after time.

Opening Questions

1. What are your thoughts about translations of the Bible?
2. Which is your favorite translation, and why?
3. How would you describe "establishing a relationship with God" to a friend?
4. Certain moments can make or break a day. Let's call those "crossroad moments." Can you give examples of crossroad moments?
5. How can the Father's presence help with crossroad moments?
6. What have you come to believe that the Kingdom of the Heavens is?

Small Group Questions

1. "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand", which is what people usually read in popular translations, means just what?
2. What does that message ask people to do?

3. Would that excite Jesus' first-time listeners?
4. What does the teaching, "The Father's Kingdom is wherever you are", ask you to do?
5. Why would you get excited about that?
6. When you ask Him to join you, does God give you guidance and power?
7. Imagine that you were in the crowd that heard Jesus earliest sermons: "You can turn your life around because *the Kingdom of the Heavens* is at hand. The Father is right beside you, available to help you with any problem that comes up." (See *Better Life*, page 9.) Do some role playing in your small group, with one of you trying to explain the "Kingdom of the Heavens" teaching to the others, who are hearing it for the first time, and are full of serious questions.

When the Groups Re-Assemble

After you summarize what each group has discovered, please share what each of you hopes to get from this series of discussions. Then take turns and ask the Father about making those hopes come true.

Gems

When you are caught up in a crossroad moment, you may try to figure it out alone, and remember later that you should have talked it over with the Father *during the crossroad moment*. The trick is to be ready for those upsetting moments, and talk things over with Him on the spot. Welcoming Him into the desires, urges and feeling surges that are not yet under His guidance, turns them over to Him. "Take complete control of my life, just as you are in control of everything in heaven", is the way Jesus put it in "The Lord's Prayer."

My Gems

(Please jot down here the gems that you discover, so that you will be able to revisit them whenever needed.)

Meeting 2: An Overview of “The Sermon on the Mount” from the Vantage Point of “The Lord’s Prayer”

We will shape our series of discussions by beginning with the sermon’s main point, instead of going from its start to its finish. When we examine the words and ideas from “The Lord’s Prayer,” we find it is a very compact presentation of major ideas found throughout the rest of the sermon. That strongly advocates that what we have in *Matthew* is an outline of the sermon. If “The Lord’s Prayer” is the main point, it *should* be a capsulated presentation of the whole sermon. So let’s take a look at “The Lord’s Prayer,” as we find it translated in *A Far Better Life*.

Our Father who is right here beside me, let Your name receive honor, not mine. Please take control in every area of my life and guide me here on earth, just as You are in control of everything in heaven. Please help me not to worry about my daily bread. Forgive me for my offenses in the same way that I forgive the offenses of others. Lead me away from lust, and rescue (deliver) me from being dishonest, like the evil one.

Here are a few of the main points that I can see in this prayer. Each one is more fully developed throughout the sermon.

1. The Father’s availability is the key to solving everyday problems.
2. Bringing honor to His name is to be our life’s goal – not to honor our own name.
3. Allowing Him to lovingly control every area of our life should be our heart’s desire. He heals our wounded hearts so we can live as members of His family.
4. We need help for daily worry. Healed hearts make worry go away.
5. Forgiveness comes very naturally from transformed hearts, particularly when the hearts are no longer pushed by retaliation urges.
6. Lust and dishonesty strongly link us to the evil one.
7. Our hearts will tell the world about our true family membership, so our prayer should be to take on the traits of the Father’s family.
8. The world is oppressive, every day, so we must call on the Father to rescue (deliver) us from that evil-prone place.

If this prayer is the climax of the sermon, and if every teaching in the rest of the sermon points to it or is an application of it, that puts “The Lord’s Prayer” in a position where its importance is sky high. It is not merely one of Jesus’ teachings. It is His *primary* teaching. It carries His main ideas about getting the Father into your life.

Opening Questions

1. In your growing-up years, did your parents pray with you at bed time? Do you still pray at bed time?
2. When do you usually pray?
3. What happens during prayer?
4. Which of the eight "Lord's Prayer" points listed above is widely known to be an important teaching? Are some not so widely taught?
5. Which of them comes easily in your life?

Small Group Questions

1. When you recite the traditional version of "The Lord's Prayer," what images appear in your mind? What images does this translation bring to you?
2. Recognizing a Father who is "right here beside me" is a sweet way to begin a prayer. It contains the faith that He not only cares, but that you can count on Him. How difficult is it to pray with this much openness and trust?
3. How does it change the prayer to pray to a Father who is far away, in heaven?
4. How has the closeness of the Father helped you at crossroad moments?
5. How much do most people struggle with worry? What about you?
6. What is difficult about forgiveness?
7. When you call upon the Father to rescue/deliver you from evil, what happens?

When the Small Groups Re-Assemble

Please share a gem that you have discovered for the first time, about "The Lord's Prayer." Take time for share and prayer – have each person open up as much as they can for prayer requests.

Gems

Pay attention to crossroad moments, those pivotal times that push you in one direction or in another, and can stop you from living from your heart. For example, in case you are asking Him to deliver you from the evil in this world, there may be crossroad moments when you get slimed. Ask Him to clean you up right then, so that you will be ready for the rest of your day.

My Gems

Meeting 3: The Hardest of Times – “The Beatitudes” and the Storms that Can Destroy You

Here are those two teachings, found at the beginning and at the end of this sermon.

“The Beatitudes”

1. *God blesses those who are spiritually broken. He is lovingly available, moment by moment, as each problem comes up, to help them establish a new spiritual life.*
2. *God blesses those who are overcome with sadness. His immediate comfort is always available.*
3. *God blesses those who hang in there when they are treated unfairly. He will help them win in the end.*
4. *God blesses those who try very hard to live correctly. His guidance will bring them peace as they make daily decisions.*
5. *God blesses those who are seriously drained from being merciful. His loving presence will keep them filled up.*
6. *God blesses those who deeply long to stay pure. As they keep their eyes on Him, He will guide them.*
7. *God blesses those who are devoted to making peace. His children are peacemakers, and He will join them in their efforts.*
8. *God blesses those who are persecuted because they follow Him. He is available to give them direction, moment by moment, as each problem comes up. His availability is the cornerstone of their spiritual foundation.*

Immediately, Jesus builds on the closing “Beatitude:”

God will bless you while you are being insulted, persecuted and slandered because you follow me. Get ready for a big surprise. Great joy will come to you while you are being persecuted, because of His presence (in the “heavens”). God has always been close to people, like the prophets, who follow Him despite opposition. His presence will give you great joy (A Far Better Life, pages 13-14).

Please also read aloud the final paragraph on page 13 – “The Beatitudes” core idea.

The Storms that Can Destroy You

When my words direct your life, it will be like building your house on a rock. Your life will be solid. You will be able to withstand anything. The wind and the rain-swollen streams may beat upon your house but it will be as good as new. It has the right foundation. But if you hear my words and do not put them into practice, that will

be like building your house on the sand. When the wind and the swollen streams pound against it, your house will be completely destroyed (p 27).

“The Beatitudes” are a perfect introduction to this sermon, as they expand on Jesus’ earlier sermon – “You can turn your life around by asking the Father into your living space.” “The Beatitudes” tell us that He will be helpful during the most difficult conditions. The teaching about destructive storms is a perfect conclusion to this sermon. Even under the most difficult conditions, a life under His direction will keep you on the right pathway.

There is something about Jesus’ “kingdom” that is, well, upside down, at least when compared with the kingdoms run by human rulers. Earthly kingdoms have power amassed at the top and not very much of it comes down to average folks. But “the Father in your living space” gives individuals who are at the bottom of the ladder, a generous share of power. In this kingdom the power starts within each person and spreads sideways, as opposed to earthly kingdoms, where power accumulates at the top and trickles downwards from rulers to average people. Therefore, in the kingdom of the heavens, the Father brings a sense of empowerment, and His people come to believe that they will be successful in their endeavors. In this kingdom people make things happen. It is not made up of people who lollygag about, waiting to be taken care of by their rulers, but rather the people are empowered to change the world around them. As the Father helps us wherever we are, we will change the world because of the power that we receive from Him. His kingdom affects the world at the grassroots level through us.

This sense of His power close at hand makes a big impact when it comes to dealing with feelings. “The Beatitudes” show Him at work to help us change our internal world at the feeling level. Most people take a different approach to dealing with strong, negative feelings that seems right and natural, and is almost automatic. “Stay away from bad feelings.” As a psychologist I have seen that approach does not work in the long run. Negative feelings need to be dealt with, not avoided. I believe that “The Beatitudes” and the teaching about destructive storms are psychologically *gorgeous*. Jesus does not teach that we are supposed to dodge bad feelings and then expect to end up in joy. Jesus is asking people to invite the Father into the crossroad moments when negative feelings are trying to gain control. Spiritually broken, overcome with sadness, hanging in there when treated unfairly, and the other negative situations alluded to in “The Beatitudes” are intended to be dealt with, not avoided. The Father’s presence will help, and because of His presence, there will be joy. This is the same idea that we see in the teaching about destructive storms. His presence will give you guidance and power to do well with the battles for your heart. He will help you get through the negative feelings that accompany horrible events.

“Crossroad moments” occur when desires, urges and surges in feelings interrupt your life. “Are you going to go this way or that?” They come from wounds pointed out by

“The Beatitudes.” The moments when a person feels spiritually broken, overcome with sadness, treated unfairly, having a hard time living correctly, failing at being merciful, staying pure, making peace or being persecuted – those “crossroad moments” are a chance to ask for the Father’s help. He can deliver relief to the wounds that are emerging right then. That is when the Father’s presence makes a difference. Don’t avoid the negative feelings. Invite Him to help you with them, so that you can win in the end.

The “gorgeous” development here is how beautifully this fits in with the rest of Jesus’ teaching about transforming our heart. When the Father is guiding our heart, we will not need to avoid negative feelings. We can believe at the heart level that He will be with us, especially during negative events and crossroad moments, and that He will guide us through storms. When you go through the narrow gate, Jesus will shed enough light ahead of you as you move along. You will find yourself entering into negative feelings, instead of avoiding them, and you will end up in joy. Transformed hearts will lead you *through* the hardest of times, not *around* them. Power for crossroad moments comes from His presence, and leads to success.

Building character. Looking at “The Beatitudes” in this light, we can see them not only as promises to help us during the difficult times in life, but they are also promises to build our character as we welcome the Father into our life, especially during crossroad moments. Think about how “The Beatitudes” read: establishing a new spiritual life, overcoming sadness, hanging in there and winning in the end, living correctly, being merciful, staying pure, peacemaking, and getting His direction moment by moment. Wow! That is a pretty big bunch of promises. Yet, that is where Jesus indicates that His teaching will take you. It begins by promising that the Father will be available to help build your character, and it ends by promising to equip you to withstand the worst storms of life.

We need to keep in mind that the key to it all is getting the Father into each crossroad moment, so that He can help build our character.

Opening Questions

1. What is a “Beatitude?” Is that word in the original text?
2. What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”?
3. Which of the hardships listed in “The Beatitudes” do you relate to most easily?
4. How does it change your life if you decide to *encounter* your negative feelings, along with the help of the Father, instead of avoiding them?

Small Group Questions

1. What storm could destroy your life? Can you see that "The Beatitudes" may be storms like that?
2. Do you know what its like to be "spiritually broken?" Is that true of you from time to time, much of the time, all of the time, or was it true of you only before you became a Christian?
3. Being overcome with sadness, treated unfairly, trying hard to live correctly and being drained because you are merciful can very easily seem like problems that may never go away. How do "The Beatitudes" suggest that these hardships can be solved? Do you believe that they can be solved?
4. How do you build your life on these teachings, as is mentioned at the end of the sermon? How do you build your life on "the sand?"
5. At the end of any particular day, can you tell whether you have been building on the rock or on the sand?
6. The final paragraph on page 13 points out that joy comes from being with the Father. What is it about being with the Father that helps you most?

When the Groups Re-Assemble

Please share not only the gems you have found while in the smaller groups, but include your thoughts about some "hard times" that may be coming up for you. Pray about these times, during your prayers for one another, before you close.

Gems

Ask the Father to help you with crossroad moments, when you feel impelled to not deal with negative feelings. It is in placing yourself under His control during crossroad moments (desires, urges and surges in feelings) that you will get Him into every area of your life. Feeling super wonderful during church worship may be good, but that does not get the Father's guidance into every area of your life. The crossroad moments that pop up during the rest of the week are where He can make His way into every nook and cranny of your life.

My Gems

An Outline for Meetings 4 to 9 – The Overview Table

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Beatitude</u>	<u>Living from Your Hurt</u>	<u>Living from Your Heart</u>
4	Sadness - #2 Being Merciful - #5	Hopelessness – p.14	Peacefulness – p. 23, 24
5	Treated Unfairly Being Persecuted	Contempt	Loving Relationships
6	Living Correctly Staying Pure	Lust	Loving Relationships
7	Making Peace	Dishonesty	Genuineness
8	Spiritually Broken Treated Unfairly	Retaliation	Forgiveness
9	Living Correctly	False Righteousness	Sincerity

Meeting 4: Hopelessness, Peacefulness and Your Heart

How are you coming with crossroad moments? As we work our way through these six meetings, you will find that the wounds highlighted during each meeting will bring challenges, especially during crossroad moments. At those times we can be overcome by pain, but because the Father is close by, we pass through it and live from our heart. “Gems” will take more careful unpacking in these areas, but they surely are there for the taking. The Father will bring your attention to them during crossroad moments.

The first half of this sermon, pages 14 to 20, is about preparing your heart to pray “The Lord’s Prayer”, without holding anything back. Wounded hearts produce unsteadiness and dividedness. After healing comes to the particular wounds, wholeness can emerge so that a person can pray that prayer with unity of heart.

In this meeting we will be looking at sadness and at the “Hopelessness Wound”, and then at “Peacefulness”, as a trait in the Family of God. These traits emerge as hearts are transformed and guided by the Father.

However, there is a fascinating aspect of this sermon that we must look at before we go any further. Following “The Lord’s Prayer” the sermon takes a different tone. *Each teaching in the second half builds upon earlier points. His ideas build upon one another. When He laid out “The Beatitudes”, He was ready to build upon them throughout the rest of the sermon. In the same way, the sermon’s second half built upon the first half.* Take a glance at the box above, to see how the sermon’s points are inter-related. Here’s what’s fascinating – “The Beatitudes” are about specific blockages in our life – painful wounds that can lead to crossroad moments. Jesus takes

us through those wounds, and in the second half He teaches about how we can rise above them. What is the result? We can live from a heart guided by the Father.

With Jesus' building-upon-earlier-ideas approach in mind, we can take a closer look at this meeting's topic – Hopelessness, Peacefulness and Your Heart. It begins with the 2nd and the 5th "Beatitudes" – "God blesses those who are overcome with sadness. His immediate comfort is always available." "God blesses those who are seriously drained from being merciful. His loving presence will keep them filled up." If you have a constant awareness that the Father is available for comfort at crossroad moments, you will be ready to deal with sadness and with being seriously drained *when it comes up*, and will not be overcome. But even then, hopelessness can result, particularly if your life is a parade of set-backs and disappointments. But before we go further into Jesus' approach to hopelessness, let's take a look at a popular translation of this passage.

Here is the *New International Version* translation of Jesus' teaching about hopelessness – salt and light – which immediately follows "The Beatitudes."

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men (*Matthew 5:13*).

It is hard to look at those words and construe that Jesus was saying it is good to be salt, even though that is often taught. Understanding this teaching, opened up for me after I had seen that the sermon's first half is about wounded hearts. Then the meaning leaped out at me. As a psychologist, I have seen that hopelessness is a profoundly difficult wound to overcome. It would be very appropriate for Jesus to identify hopelessness as the first wound He addresses. Hopelessness cannot be overlooked when it comes to heart wounds. Here is Jesus' approach to hopelessness (pp 14 – 15).

You may feel like salt on the ground. Salt is only valuable if it stays salty, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be discarded and trampled by men. I really do understand that you sometimes feel like an old pile of discarded, trampled salt. If you lose life's richness, you may believe that you will never get it back.

But here is something encouraging to keep in mind. You are the light that shines throughout the world, and you will make a difference everywhere you go. You will carry God with you. Like a city on a hill, you will not be hidden. People do not light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand so that it will give light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light shine before men so that they may see your good deeds and glorify the Father who helps you with everything. Don't give up. You will make a difference, and God will receive all of the credit.

You can see that Jesus begins this half of the sermon by bringing hopefulness solidly into the picture. "Don't give up. You will make a difference." On the other hand, when hopelessness reigns, a person can find no reason to pray. Honestly, when a person is stuck in hopelessness, even God is considered to be of no help. This is why Jesus addressed hopelessness at the beginning of the heart wound section. Only when this wound is cleared up can "The Lord's Prayer" be prayed from a unified heart.

Opening Questions

1. What do you think about the "building ideas" approach in the Overview Table?
2. What makes people hopeless? (Give as many examples as you can.)
3. How many people do you know who sometimes struggle with hopelessness?
4. How many people do you know who have been suicidal or have even tried to carry it out?
5. How do you encourage people who are hopeless? Does it work?
6. Does this teaching suggest a way to overcome hopelessness?

Small Group Questions

1. Can you identify crossroad moments when feeling sad or feeling drained from being merciful pulled at you strongly? How can you handle those moments?
2. Re-read the verses about salt and light. What images come to you? How do you feel when you catch those images?
3. Hopelessness is most people's worst nightmare of a feeling. What about you?
4. How does hopelessness affect your heart?
5. What kind of a personal injury (wound) would produce hopelessness?
 - Injuries usually come from traumas or from neglect.
 - Look for present day injuries, past injuries, spiritual or emotional injuries.
6. How does a person go from "salt" to "light"?

When the Groups Re-Assemble

Instead of sharing what you discussed in the small groups, when you get together, please read aloud the scripture translated on page 24. Pray that you will let God develop that kind of peacefulness in your heart. Then go around the group with share and prayer time.

Gems

Whenever a friendship begins to go south, even for a few minutes, invite the Father into your living space. Loving relationships can work through problems with His help.

My Gems

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Beatitude</u>	<u>Living from Your Hurt</u>	<u>Living from Your Heart</u>
4	Sadness Being Merciful	Hopelessness	Peacefulness
5	Treated Unfairly - #3 Being Persecuted - #8	Contempt - p. 16,	Loving Relationships - p. 24, 25
6	Living Correctly Staying Pure	Lust	Loving Relationships
7	Making Peace	Dishonesty	Genuineness
8	Spiritually Broken Treated Unfairly	Retaliation	Forgiveness
9	Living Correctly	False Righteousness	Sincerity

Meeting 5: Contempt, Loving Relationships and Your Heart

It is a ruthless and unpredictable world. People often suffer from unprovoked anger and violence. As “The Lord’s Prayer” indicates, we are to rely on Him to rescue us from the evil we find all around us. But even when our prayer life is going well, we can still tire of unexpected insults and assaults. And we can find that contempt has made its way into our life. *Contempt is the feeling that comes when someone blocks you from living the life that you would like to live.*

Contempt not only interferes with loving relationships, it interferes with a person’s prayer life. Perhaps you have seen contempt in others. It builds up inside and then it will not go away. It, perhaps more than any other feeling, is poisonous. It damages self and others. “I’m mad at my brother, and I’m mad at God, and I’m not going to simply forget it.” Jesus knew about that poison, and how easy it is for people to get caught in it. The second “Beatitude” is where He began to address contempt, and He addressed it again in the 8th “Beatitude.” Both “Beatitudes” promise that His presence will help us to win difficult battles.

God helps those who hang in there when they are treated unfairly. He will help them win in the end.

God helps those who are persecuted because they follow Him. He is available to give them direction, moment by moment, as each problem comes up. His availability is the cornerstone of their spiritual foundation.

Contempt does not have to reign in our lives. As Jesus put it, you need to catch contempt problems early so that they do not clog up your heart. Read the “Contempt” section aloud, starting on page 16.

Opening Questions

1. What is our automatic, human reaction to being treated unfairly? (Give some personal examples.)
2. How is contempt different from anger?
3. Can a person hide contempt? How does it show itself?
4. What about racism, and de-valuing people's human rights – does that come from contempt?
5. What have you observed about contempt and court proceedings?
6. How does contempt creep into family settings?

Small Group Questions

1. Can you think of crossroad moments when you were influenced by being treated unfairly or being persecuted? How could you handle those moments?
2. How does contempt affect your heart?
3. What are the signs that contempt is building up inside of you?
4. What do you do in crossroad moments when anger takes over?
5. Jesus mentioned a few points in the "Loving Relationships" section that help us with contempt, on page 25: stop judging people, look at your own faults, stop being pushy about your religious ideas, be genuine, be non-manipulative and treat people as you want to be treated. Which of these helps you with contempt and angry feelings?
6. If it's all about loving God, neighbor and self, how does contempt get in the way?
7. How does the Father help your heart with contempt?

When the Groups Re-Assemble

Do your best to share highlights from the smaller groups. Have someone try to summarize just how contempt becomes poison in the family of God. In your prayer requests, do not stop sharing your weekly requests, but also try to include problems that are showing up during crossroad moments, as you live in God's family.

Gems

Your life will be contempt free if God is in your living space, because other people will not be able to frustrate you. With the Father's guidance and power, you will shed people's insults and assaults as though you were Teflon coated. Nothing sticks because of His presence, and because of your understanding that He is in charge all of the time.

My Gems

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Beatitude</u>	<u>Living from Your Hurt</u>	<u>Living from Your Heart</u>
4	Sadness Being Merciful	Hopelessness	Peacefulness
5	Treated Unfairly Being Persecuted	Contempt	Loving Relationships
6	Living Correctly-#4 Staying Pure -#6	Lust – p. 17	Loving Relationships – p. 24, 25
7	Making Peace	Dishonesty	Genuineness
8	Spiritually Broken Treated Unfairly	Retaliation	Forgiveness
9	Living Correctly	False Righteousness	Sincerity

Meeting 6: Lust, Loving Relationships and Your Heart

Advertisements about sexual enhancement drugs and about improving sexual performance are making their way into prime time television. Popular Christian books and programs about sexual addiction and pornography are making their way into the Christian community. Perhaps the time has come for resources to concentrate on this problem. Jesus surely did not leave this area of woundedness off of His “problems” list.

Two of Jesus’ “Beatitudes” suggest He will not dodge this problem:

God blesses those who try very hard to live correctly. His guidance will bring them peace as they make daily decisions.

God blesses those who deeply long to stay pure. As they keep their eyes on Him, He will guide them.

“The Father in your living space” is essential to living correctly and to staying pure. Please read aloud the first full paragraph on page 17.

Perhaps this is a good time to review what the heart is, and how it operates. The heart is where God makes contact with you. If you are going to get Him into every area of your life, that will be because you are keeping your heart clean, and so He is welcome into each area. If you read the last full paragraph on page 19, you will get an idea about heart battles. Lust is a battleground, and your identity may very well go to the victor.

Opening Questions

1. Do you believe that our culture is changing in its attitudes about sex and about fidelity?
2. What is your church's stance on "living correctly" and on "staying pure"? Is it a "rules approach", or does it invite God to help with sexual problems?
3. Does that stance push people away from church or draw them toward it?
4. Are men or women better at solving "the lust problem"?

Small Group Questions

It may be a good idea to break up into men's and women's small groups for this topic.

1. Try to identify crossroad moments when striving to live correctly or staying pure have been critical in your day. How can you handle those moments?
2. What kind of an injury (wound) can lead to problems in this area?
3. What damage can come from pornography?
4. How can lust damage your heart?
5. Let's get real: We're all driven by sexual urges, we're all designed to relate sexually and we're all supposed to bring sexual impulses under control. In which arenas of your daily life do you get tested here?
6. How does "asking the Father into your living space" work for you in this area?
7. What stops you from bringing the Father alongside to help with this?
8. In which of the areas highlighted by Jesus do you need the Father's help in the area of lust – stop judging people, look at your own faults, stop being pushy about your religious ideas, be genuine, be non-manipulative and treat people as you want to be treated?

When the Groups Re-Assemble

Please share what you have discovered about the Father's role in this battleground issue. Take time for share and prayer.

Gems

Living from your heart will help you be the person that you are all of the time, particularly in the area of sexuality. Your identity as a sexual person was not handed to you by your parents, but by your creator, who wants to bless you just as He created you.

My Gems

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Beatitude</u>	<u>Living from Your Hurt</u>	<u>Living from Your Heart</u>
4	Sadness Being Merciful	Hopelessness	Peacefulness
5	Treated Unfairly Being Persecuted	Contempt	Loving Relationships
6	Living Correctly Staying Pure	Lust	Loving Relationships
7	Making Peace- #7 Dishonesty – p. 17		Genuineness – p. 23
8	Spiritually Broken Treated Unfairly	Retaliation	Forgiveness
9	Living Correctly	False Righteousness	Sincerity

Meeting 7: Dishonesty, Genuineness and Your Heart

Every time you talk *with anyone*, you assume the person is being honest, or the conversation will go nowhere. The relationship will go nowhere. *Truth* is fundamental. We must believe that what we get from the other person is the truth, or there is no reason to speak further. You carry that fact with you into every conversation, so you will need to be transparent and refreshingly honest – genuine -- if you expect to have meaningful relationships. Trust and honesty go hand-in-hand. The opposite of trust – betrayal – leads to hostility. Bottom line: Dishonest people are not trustworthy, and end up with hostile relationships.

As you remember, “rescue (deliver) me from being dishonest, like the evil one” is how Jesus closed His prayer. That puts honesty pretty high on the “hot topics” list. The Father wants to help you develop honesty, as we will see in the “dishonesty” and the “genuineness” teachings. But let’s first take a look at how one of the “Beatitudes” prepares us for those teachings.

God blesses those who are devoted to making peace. His children are peacemakers, and He will join them in their efforts.

Welcoming the Father into your peacemaking efforts makes sense. This “Beatitude” stresses that creating peaceful relationships is difficult, but it is an essential part of life in the Father’s family. *His participation in peacemaking means that it will be joyful. It will be worth the effort.* A peacemaker must be trustworthy (genuine). Please read the “Dishonesty” section on page 17.

Let me highlight a conversation that I had on a plane with a woman from Asia. When she saw that I was reading a book about Multiple Personality, she could hardly wait to tell me about her culture. She assured me that her people always wear a happy face! They are one person at home and a completely different person in public. This is a

must, because they are not allowed to give any clues about their family. She emphasized that child abuse is rampant there, and hiddenness keeps the abuse secret. She became animated about how very split her people are, completely hidden to the outside world. At first I left that plane ride smugly considering my culture to be much better than hers. That did not last. Soon I began to realize that we are the same. In fact, it seems almost inevitable that people from any culture will not be able to open up in public about their home problems. There are times when we all wear a mask.

Opening Questions

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages about wearing a mask?
2. "Happy faces, every one!" What an attack the TV world makes against honesty. Can you remember looking at photos from about a century ago, when people did not wear phony smiles? Those photos were more believable than today's. How does needing to "look good" affect our spiritual life?
3. How does this affect people in a church setting?
4. What kind of an injury (wound) would lead to dishonesty?
5. Please read the "Genuineness and Your Heart" section on page 23. Can you see how deception gets in the way of "living from your heart"?

Small Group Questions

1. Which of the page 23 areas that Jesus mentioned do you need some work on – appearing very religious, appearing financially fit, or being satisfied with living "in the light" only part of the time? (That final clause refers to "integrity", as mentioned on page 17.)
2. Do you see the connection between "genuineness" and "fellowship" in the Family of God?
3. There are certainly "levels" of genuineness. How deeply transparent and refreshingly honest can you be with people? Can you speak of your deepest conflicts and your deepest areas of doubt?
4. (For these final two questions, please consider "transparent" and "genuineness" to be synonyms.) Here is a fact: genuineness invites genuineness from the other person. (Transparency invites transparency.) What can you do to be more genuine/transparent?
5. What prevents you from being genuine/transparent?

When the Groups Re-Assemble

What does genuineness look like? Please share what you discovered about transparency and about genuineness before you go to share and prayer time.

Gems

Sharing about your struggles, including hopelessness, anger, lust and worry, will help you become more transparent.

Being genuine takes considerable effort. Look for crossroad moments in which you could be more open, but are also compelled to hide. The Father's help is essential to produce the right words and to omit the wrong ones. Here's the gem: Your heart does not need to "work" to get the right words and avoid the wrong ones. It comes easily for hearts under His guidance.

My Gems

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Beatitude</u>	<u>Living from Your Hurt</u>	<u>Living from Your Heart</u>
4	Sadness Being Merciful	Hopelessness	Peacefulness
5	Treated Unfairly Being Persecuted	Contempt	Loving Relationships
6	Living Correctly Staying Pure	Lust	Loving Relationships
7	Making Peace	Dishonesty	Genuineness
8	Spiritually Broken - #1 Treated Unfairly - #3	Retaliation - p. 18	Forgiveness - p. 21
9	Living Correctly	False Righteousness	Sincerity

Meeting 8: Retaliation, Forgiveness and Your Heart

Preparation for being a forgiving person. Like many people, I have been all over the map for years, trying to explain forgiveness to people. It is especially hard for the most seriously abused people to even speak about forgiving the monster who hurt them so badly. I believe that Jesus' three-part approach to teaching about forgiveness works pretty well. It begins with the humbling experience of getting in touch with our human condition – being spiritually broken, yet declared unconditionally forgiven. That is where the first “Beatitude” provides a solid foundation. God will be with us in our brokenness, and will help us start over. Thanks so much, Jesus, for starting us at that point. You see, it will not work to speak words of forgiveness until there is a depth of understanding about how we have been forgiven.

Looking at the third “Beatitude”, we can see another component of what it takes to get ready to become a forgiving person. “Hanging in there when being treated unfairly” is not a natural response, but that is needed to be ready to forgive. Healing for the retaliation reaction needs to be in place before forgiveness can automatically come forward. Forgiveness takes some character development.

Clear thinking about forgiveness. Most “forgiveness” explanations ooze with sloppy thinking. Of all the messages, seminars and talks that I have heard about forgiveness, none has given a definition. Consequently, there has seldom been any practical understanding conveyed. I always explain forgiveness with two examples of what forgiveness is **not**: It is **not** a feeling, and it is **not** reconciliation. You will not feel a certain way, and there is no formula that promises reconciliation. Here is the definition that I have been using for about 15 years. *Forgiveness is the decision to not retaliate.* That definition has stood the test of time, and seems to fit just about any situation that comes up. I am very pleased to find that this definition fits hand-in-hand with Jesus' teaching.

Jesus' teaching about retaliation and forgiveness. It is noteworthy that Jesus put the retaliation teaching just ahead of "The Lord's Prayer", and the forgiveness teaching immediately after it. These two teachings are complementary, like two sides of the same coin. Forgiveness is even mentioned in the prayer, so we can see how central it is to Jesus' thinking.

(1) Face your brokenness and face your reaction to being treated unfairly. This will begin to build your character, so that you will be ready for the rest of His approach to forgiveness. (2) Give up retaliation completely, and then you will be able to (3) forgive others from the heart. Working this out with the Father during crossroad moments will produce heart-based forgiveness.

Read aloud the "Retaliation" section on page 18.

One-sided or two-sided forgiveness. When forgiveness works as it should, the offending person makes recompense – there is a sharing of money or tears or something that concretely pays back the offended person. This is "two-sided forgiveness." But that's not how things usually work. When people are hurt, the offending person often gets defensive and denies the offense. The offended person is unjustly left to pay the damages or suffer the injury, with no repayment, or chance for correcting the injustice. This is when one-sided forgiveness is called for – when you have been unjustly damaged, and you are called on to forgive the offending person even though there was no confession. This is so tough – beyond the extent of our natural ability. I believe that this sermon leads us to strive to be honest when we have offended others, and then seek two-way forgiveness. The difficulty comes in the area of one-way forgiveness, when we do not forgive the offenses of others (verse 15). Bottom line: When the person has hurt me, and I do not forgive, I am the one who will suffer. If I cannot forgive, I will live with the destabilizing urge to get even, or to nurse my unhealed wounds.

Making forgiveness happen. You can take a look at the "Loving Relationships and Your Heart" section on pages 24 and 25. The Father in your living space may help you with judging others, looking at your own faults instead of others', and His other suggestions there.

Opening Questions

1. What is the difference between two-way forgiveness and reconciliation?
2. What is the difference between two-way forgiveness and one-way forgiveness?
3. Why do you think that forgiveness is the first family-of-God trait mentioned, following "The Lord's Prayer"? (Notice that unforgiveness smacks of contempt.)
4. If the definition is, "Forgiveness is the decision to not retaliate", what makes it hard to make that decision?

5. What makes it easy to be generous with family and friends, and pray for them, yet hard to be generous with and pray for enemies?

Small Group Questions

1. In the verse, "If you forgive others when they sin against you . . ." how can the Father who is right by your side help you with forgiveness?
2. How does this help you build character?
3. Give some examples of times when one-way forgiveness has been called for in your life. (Perhaps when you have been abused or when you have been taken advantage of financially, or in a lawsuit.)
4. Can you share instances when the lack of forgiveness has led to problems in your life or in your family?
5. How did you "get over" the desire to retaliate?
6. Does it help you in crossroad moments to go over the first and third beatitudes? If not, how can you make those beatitudes more helpful?

When the Groups Re-Assemble

What does a forgiving person look like? Please share the gems that emerged in the smaller groups before share and prayer time.

Gems

Since forgiveness is not a feeling (it is a decision) you can reach it even though you don't feel good about the offending person.

My Gems

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Beatitude</u>	<u>Living from Your Hurt</u>	<u>Living from Your Heart</u>
4	Sadness Being Merciful	Hopelessness	Peacefulness
5	Treated Unfairly Being Persecuted	Contempt	Loving Relationships
6	Living Correctly Staying Pure	Lust	Loving Relationships
7	Making Peace	Dishonesty	Genuineness
8	Spiritually Broken Treated Unfairly	Retaliation	Forgiveness
9	Living Correctly - #4 False Righteousness - p. 19 Sincerity - p. 26		

Meeting 9: False Righteousness, Sincerity and Your Heart

“Righteousness” means “living rightly”, or “living correctly.” There is something about *trying* to live correctly that misses the point. When our heart *desires* to live correctly we will not feel forced to live right, but we will seek it. I believe that when a heart has Jesus’ touch, wanting to live correctly comes automatically. That is what the “living correctly Beatitude” is all about – sensing that we need to be pure in heart or we will not get life right.

Still, this is a call to examine whether we are *truly* getting life right. As Paul put it when identifying the Armor of God in *Ephesians*, it is correct living (the breastplate of righteousness) that protects your heart. Perhaps it can go both ways: Try to live right and you will protect your heart, but keep your heart clean so that you will be able to live right. Above all, invite the Father into your living space to bring both your heart and your actions into alignment with Him.

The “not good enough” wound. The “False Righteousness” section on page 19 is about attracting personal attention by appearing to be a very religious person. Please read it aloud, and then try to think of crossroad moments in your life that spring from this wound. “Living from your hurt” on that page goes contrary to “may your name receive honor, not mine.” There must be an unhealed wound that gets in the way of giving honor to God. This wound may very well be a “not good enough” wound that does not stop seeking personal attention. Healing will need to come before the person can automatically promote God instead of self.

The “false pride” wound. Another area of woundedness is in the “Sincerity” section, on page 26. This one sneaks up on us all. When God does great things through us, it is so easy to take credit! I do not heal people. I call upon God to heal people’s wounds, often after I have helped identify the wounds. I do not expel spirits. God sends them away after I call upon Him to do so. He does the work and I am privileged to watch Him overcome evil with good. Even though that is truly my heart, there is always a hint of the following kind of

thinking somewhere in the back of my mind: "God is so lucky to have me on His team." This comes from a "false pride" wound. Acts 19:11-23 brings us an informative story about people who try to use the power of God's name for their personal glory. Take a little time to read it and see if you have crossroad moments that come from this wound.

"Hiding their selfish heart behind the appearance of good behavior." What a chilling way for Jesus to describe people's false righteousness. People will know when I want to get all of the credit, and when I want to be center stage. People will also be able to tell when I am pleased to "reflect His glory" (2 Cor. 3:17-18). That happens when our heart is receiving power from the Father who is in our living space.

Opening Questions

1. Do religious settings tempt you to appear more "righteous" than other settings?
2. What examples come to your mind of certain people being a bit falsely righteous?
3. Have you ever been in a church with some examples of that?
4. How does a heart direct behavior?
5. How does "looking good" get in the way of "righteous living"?

Small Group Questions

1. Are there times when you feel pushed to be falsely righteous in public prayers?
2. How does the "not good enough" wound show up in your life?
3. Can you explain how these wounds produce false righteousness?
4. How does false righteousness obstruct a person's heart?
5. What can you do to be more sincere?
6. Explain how talking about "false righteousness crossroad moments" with the Father can build your character.

When the Groups Re-Assemble

This meeting could be painstakingly revealing. Take a risk and share what the Father in your living space has been telling you about sincerity. Please include the share and prayer time.

Gems

Saying, "May your name receive honor, not mine" is not humanly natural, and feels a bit alien at first. However, when it comes from a heart that is guided by the Father, a wonderful feeling comes when honoring Him.

My Gems

Meeting 10: Living in The Father's Family

The Family of God and Other Families. A few years ago I read a counselor's definition of "what a family is." He wrote that a family is the people who meet a person's deepest needs. He did not distinguish between a person's biological family and the social network of people who fill those needs. Although I'd like to cite the writer, I've long forgotten who he is, but let's thank him for sharing this insight. Needs begin early in life, where we cannot physically survive without caretakers, and we continue to rely on other people for survival throughout our whole life. Meeting deep needs continues to pull at us quite strongly. It is not an option to "make it on your own" as an adult, any more than it is an option to strike out on your own as a newborn.

Meeting maturity needs. For those of you who have a copy of *The Life Model: Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You*, take a look at the "Maturity Indicators Chart", which goes from page 51 to 56. The five stages of maturity are listed there, along with the most important needs to be met during each stage. Here is a brief summary of that material, which helps people understand how to progress in maturity, and how to help each other to live more effectively in the family of God.

A community consists of people in each of the 5 stages of life, assisting each other to complete their maturity tasks, along the way to the next stage. The first stage is infancy, ages 1 to 3, where a person learns to receive life unconditionally. The next stage goes from 4 to 12, where a person learns to take care of self. Then comes adulthood, stage 3, and that lasts from 12 until parenthood. The task there is to learn to care for self and others. Parenthood – stage four – includes the task of caring unconditionally for an infant, teaching stage 2 children to take care of themselves, and helping young adults to reach their goals as well. Stage 5 is the elder stage, which begins when the children have left home. An elder's task is to use every lesson learned during previous stages, and to teach them to those people who are downstream. Every person in the first four stages needs to learn how to successfully reach their maturity goals, along with help from elders. Each person is to be involved with people in all of the other stages, giving to those downstream and receiving from those upstream. Uh, elders, you will need to receive too, so please find elders who are upstream to get your elder-stage needs met.

The "Maturity Indicators Chart" takes a page for each stage, and lists personal tasks for people in that stage. There is also a column for how the community and family can contribute to the task, and a third column for what happens when the stage-related tasks fail. The final column goes beyond other approaches to developmental psychology by tying together the person's individual maturity tasks with what is supposed to be received in family life, and how that can lead to "mental illness" when it fails. For further study, please consult a copy of *The Life Model*.

Meeting maturity needs and spiritual needs. As we began this meeting's notes of the study guide, we found that a family consists of the people who meet your deepest needs. I hope that the above section about maturity will guide people to satisfy each other's deepest maturity needs. But even when the deepest maturity needs are met, there is another essential need – to receive life from the creator. That is where the family of God can meet a person's deepest spiritual needs. In the same way that a child models after parents, there is a similar pathway for spiritual growth – we need other humans to show us how it works. The Father's contribution is key, but so are other humans' contributions. Here is a metaphor to describe how these forces can work together:

Rockets need to carry two kinds of tanks to create the power they need – one for fuel and one for oxygen. The fuel will not burn unless it is mixed with oxygen when it is ignited. Got a rocket? It won't have any power without both. We find the same applies to humans. Our family supplies the fuel and God supplies the oxygen. There is no power available to us when we worship our family – the “just family” option – or when we say that we don't need people – the “just God” option. Clearly, God is essential, but so is His family. Apart from God and His family, this planet becomes a barren wasteland of twisted maturity and empty spirituality. Family dysfunction? Spiritual brokenness? They are birds of a feather.

It is now becoming clear why Jesus spent so much time in this sermon, going over the characteristics that make His family work well – forgiveness, genuineness, peacefulness, sincerity and loving relationships. These come from the Father guiding our character development, as we have seen during the past 6 lessons. And that is also why Jesus spent a few years with the disciples – they needed Him to show them what it looks like to live from a heart guided by the Father.

Building character takes time. Take a look at what we found in the third discussion, about how people can look as “The Beatitudes” come on line in their life: establishing a new spiritual life, overcoming sadness, hanging in there and winning in the end, living correctly, being merciful, staying pure, peacemaking, and getting His direction moment by moment. Remember that “The Beatitudes” are a promise that the Father will help you develop into that kind of a person. Building character takes time.

What can we expect? Here is a question that Jesus did not answer in this sermon. “What happens when people develop these traits and live from their heart under the Father's guidance?” Phenomenal accomplishments happen. Think about it. People you know who have walked with God for a while tend to make a pretty big difference. How do they do it? By following His guidance in fairly insignificant, mundane, daily life tasks. The Father gives power beyond what we imagine, and He magnifies the effects of our small tasks. Over time, He is able to do bigger and better work in and through us. His “kingdom in the heavens” now becomes much more than a catchy phrase. It truly is wherever we go, because He is there and He makes huge changes, transforming not only the citizens in His

kingdom but transforming the world as He works through them. What He said about us being the light of the world is exactly what happens.

Spending sustained time with God turns people into powerhouses. That is not what they seek, but that is what happens. A few examples are found in the Bible. Of course there were the disciples, a collection of nondescript men, who we found changing Jerusalem at first, and soon they changed the world in wonderful ways. Three years with Jesus did a lot for them. That was also the case for Paul. When we found him knocked off of his horse, it took him three years with Jesus as his personal trainer before he was good to go. And what was the result? He was ready to carry the good news to the far reaches of the Roman Empire, in a life changing way. He created a growing movement, and the kingdom of the heavens spread from one person to another, house to house, city to city because he was spreading light. People became passionate Jesus followers in many home-based life groups through his work.

His disciples and the Apostle Paul are easy to spot when we are looking for people who learned directly from Jesus. But what about John the Baptist? I believe that he is a great example of what to expect from someone who lives in the family of God. John was Jesus' second cousin, so if anyone would be influenced by Jesus during his growing-up years, it would be him. *The Gospel of Luke* tells us that John's and Jesus' mothers were cousins, and that John leaped for joy in the womb when Mary announced to John's mother that she would bear the Messiah. John sensed Jesus' presence from his earliest days, while he was still in Elizabeth's womb. And it must be true that as the same-age cousins grew up, they must have gotten together quite a few times while at family gatherings, and at Jerusalem twice or three times each year, during the national holidays. If I were John as a young child, I would look forward to being with my cousin Jesus. It must have been a majorly stretching boyhood for John to have Jesus around a few times each year. I believe that John got his impetus to become who he was because of Jesus. Jesus even got him to understand "the good news", as no other person could. It is telling – even striking – to note that at three places we find *The Gospel of Matthew* quoting John while he was baptizing and preaching, and he was using very similar language as Jesus.

In *Matthew* 3:2 we find John giving the same sermon that Jesus gave: "You can turn your life around because the Father is ready to join you in your living space, to help you with anything that comes up." The manuscript of *Matthew* lists the exact words that we hear from Jesus' "nutshell" account of His early sermons, found in *Matthew* 4:17. This suggests that Jesus helped John, during his pre-public years, to grasp the importance of "establishing a relationship" with the Father.

In *Mathew* 3:10 John the Baptist admonished the Pharisees that if they don't show good fruit, they will be cut down and destroyed like bad fruit trees. That's exactly what Jesus said in *Matthew* 7:10.

John drove his point home to the Pharisees by calling them a “brood of vipers” (*Matthew 3:7*), which is one of the terms used by Jesus in His challenge to the Pharisees in *Matthew 23*.

It should not surprise us when we hear in *Matthew 3:13* that John was reluctant to baptize Jesus. He said that it is Jesus who should baptize John. He was looking at his cousin, right then, who apparently had very strongly shaped his thinking. Please, reader, do not expect that this is a minor point: John the Baptist knew about the kingdom of the heavens – establishing a relationship with God – and that term propelled John into the lime light. That idea came directly from his cousin, Jesus. When Jesus asked to be baptized, John could have said, “That would be like a student baptizing his professor!” Bottom line: John became a man who made a wonderful difference in many peoples’ lives, and changed the world because he lived in the family of God, and because what he received from Jesus gave him direction for his life.

Turning every area of life over to the Father. As mentioned earlier, it is during our crossroad moments that we have a chance to turn a new area of life over to God. Throughout this discussion guide we have been finding that “The Beatitudes” have helped us identify crossroad moments – when we are overcome with our spiritual brokenness, sadness, being treated unfairly, and the other difficulties. Let’s say that “crossroad moments” occur because desires, urges and surges in feelings come from wounds. Bouts of hopelessness, contempt, false righteousness and the other wounds would like some relief. They can catch us off guard, leaving us on our own to deal with the interruptive feelings. That is where the Father’s presence makes a difference. Don’t avoid the negative feelings. Invite Him to help you with them, so that you can win in the end. As each crossroad moment is turned over to Him, you will be a step closer to giving Him control in every area of your life.

Living in the family of God. Perhaps the crucial crossroad moments are those that come up in the family setting. We can see that getting maturity needs met during each succeeding stage of life is tough. Helping each other, and not hindering each other to get through the stage-related tasks, is just where crossroad moments make a difference. Are you oozing with contempt? That will block you from listening to the people in your family. Are you hopeless? That will block you from being available for your family. I trust that these two examples will give you a sense of the bigger picture: As the Father develops His traits in your life, you will be maximally loving to your family members, and your family will have a good chance of being guided by the Father.

As “The Sermon on the Mount” unfolded, Jesus outlined just what it takes for people to stop living from their hurt, and take the Father’s guidance in living from their heart. That is when the family of God works best.

Opening Questions

1. Was your church background in a “restrictive” or “permissive” church?
2. Which *Beatitude* points to your life?
First: spiritually broken
Second: overcome with sadness
Third: treated too unfairly to hang in there
Fourth: struggling to live correctly
Fifth: drained from being merciful
Sixth: longing to stay pure
Seventh: depleted from peacemaking
Eighth: persecuted for your spiritual life
3. How do these areas of struggle affect your family life?
4. Do they block you from hearing God’s voice?
5. Which wound does your *Beatitude* deal with? [Hopelessness, contempt, lust, dishonesty, retaliation and false righteousness are mentioned in the sermon.]
6. Are these the “storms that can bring your house down”, as the final teaching in this sermon puts it?

Small Group Questions

1. Describe your best and worst experiences in “the family of God.” [Try to keep it brief. Just summarize the situation in a sentence or two.]
2. How have these affected your at-home family?
3. How has God led you during these times?
4. How can you use these experiences to help people who are close to you in the family of God?

When the Groups Re-Assemble

1. Share what you have learned about being in “the Family of God” so far today.
2. What can you do to grow into the “family of God” heart features that are outlined by Jesus? [Forgiveness, genuineness, peacefulness, loving relationships and sincerity/integrity are mentioned.]

Gems

Giving the Father control in every area of your life will take winning many little skirmishes over a long period of time. He will give you grace along the way, so don’t be too hard on yourself when you lose a few skirmishes. The Father will help you win in the end.

My Gems

This would be a good time to go back and review the gems that you have unpacked from the earlier meetings, along with this week’s gems gathered from the treasure trove.