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## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: A Reader-Friendly Version

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This sermon is recorded in *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Chapters 5-7. The translated text below is in italics, with explanatory notes in non-italicized font. The second chapter in *A Far Better Life* is almost identical. That book presents a fuller understanding of the sermon, and outlines how it fits into Christian Counseling. Revisions for this version are found in *The Beatitudes* and in *The Lord's Prayer*.

If you would like to use this material in a discussion group, you can use the text below or the text in *A Far Better Life*, along with the discussion guide found on this web site: "Plundering the Treasure Trove: Installing Gems from Jesus." My belief is that to read this sermon is a good beginning, but if you would like to build your life on it, a discussion group would be quite helpful.

Once He began speaking in local synagogues, people could talk about nothing else. Many of them lived a few days' walk away, but they sought Him out, nonetheless, because He was changing peoples' lives. They came together that day, on a hillside that overlooked a huge lake and a mountain range that stretched out and diminished, as it met the horizon, far to the south. Jesus gained His listeners' rapt attention right away by talking about people's most pressing struggles. This prosaic opening is called *The Beatitudes*.

### *The Beatitudes*

*5:3 God's blessing rests on those who are spiritually broken. The Kingdom of the Heavens is for them, and it makes everything new.*

*4 God's blessing rests on those who are overcome with sadness. His immediate comfort is always near.*

*5 God's blessing rests on those who do not give up when they are treated unfairly. He will help them win in the end.*

*6 God's blessing rests on those who strive to live correctly. His guidance will bring them peace as they make daily decisions.*

*7 God's blessing rests on those who are seriously drained from being merciful. His loving presence will keep them filled up.*

*8 God's blessing rests on those who deeply long to have a pure heart. As they keep their eyes on Him, He will help them to be pure.*

*9 God's blessing rests on those who are devoted to peace. His children are peacemakers, and He will join them in their efforts.*

*10 God's blessing rests on those who are persecuted for doing what is right. The Kingdom of the Heavens is for them, and it makes everything new.*

Jesus immediately builds on the closing *Beatitude*, adding that the Father's closeness will bring great help during persecution.

*11-12 God's blessing will rest on you while you are being insulted, persecuted and slandered because you follow me. Surprisingly, joy will come to you during the persecution, because of God's presence. His presence has always been with those who follow Him despite opposition, like the prophets, for example. His presence will give you overflowing joy.*

Here is the core idea that Jesus developed in *The Beatitudes*.

I know how hard your life is. You may believe that God will never send you His goodness. Trust me. You can live a far better life if you welcome Him. He is always ready to help, especially during hard times. Whenever you are spiritually broken, overcome with sadness, treated unfairly, striving to stay pure, seriously drained, deeply longing to stay pure, overwhelmed and persecuted, be encouraged. God is eager to bring His power into your life. Welcome His presence. It is wonderful to be with the Father. By inviting Him into your living space, you will enter into the Kingdom of the Heavens.

## PREPARING YOUR HEART

*The Beatitudes* challenge us to invite the Father into our daily struggles, and thereby enter into the Kingdom of the Heavens. That is the first step. Preparing our heart to receive His guidance is second, so Jesus takes that up next.

Here is an overview of the sermon that shows how “Preparing Your Heart” fits in. After *The Beatitudes*, Jesus covers six heart-defeating problems. This “Preparing Your Heart” section leads to the sermon’s climax, *The Lords Prayer*. The remainder of the sermon turns from “Preparing Your Heart” to “Living from a Transformed Heart”, using the heart-preparation ideas as building blocks to live under His guidance. Jesus prepared people for the sermon’s end from its beginning. He covered six problems in the first half. Each needs His attention so that you will be ready for His guidance. These ideas are nicely interwoven and fit together without any loose ends. The sermon is a masterpiece.

As we enter the first half, please keep the sermon flow in mind. You cannot afford to overlook “Preparing Your Heart,” because apart from that you will not be ready to receive His guidance in daily living. Heart wounds can create too much noise to hear God clearly. Jesus begins with hopelessness, because the hopelessness wound is a heart killer. His approach is remarkably encouraging.

## HOPELESSNESS

*13 You may feel like spoiled 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.<sup>1</sup>*

*14 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 because He is with you. Like a city on a hill, you will not be hidden. 15 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. 16 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.*

## THE FATHER’S GUIDANCE vs. RULES

Jesus needed to address an obstacle. Teachers said we need rules in addition to “the law and the prophets.” But Jesus said God’s everlasting law, the Old

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<sup>1</sup> Some teachers believe that Jesus told his listeners here that they should hope to become “the salt of the earth.” That is not what the text is saying. Their salt came from the Dead Sea. It was not uniformly tasty, and freshness was certainly not guaranteed. Spoiled salt is what Jesus spoke of here, the kind you just don’t need. Nobody hopes to become “throw-away salt on the ground.”

Testament, goes hand-in-hand with His teaching. Jesus needed to expose the self-defeating nature of those extra, man-made rules. He made this point about “rules” in order to speak authoritatively about the next four heart preparation areas. He needed to free people from “the rules approach.” Rules do not tell you how to live. A healthy heart, attuned to God, will direct your actions from the inside out. That is His approach, and it is consistent with God’s revealed law.

*17 Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest part of the law will by any means disappear. Follow the revealed laws. 19 Anyone who breaks the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the Kingdom of the Heavens. God will not guide you to break His commandments. 20 Extra rules are the problem. Unless you live even more correctly than the scribes and the Pharisees, who have devoted their lives to following the extra rules that are not from God, you will not be able to enter the Kingdom of the Heavens. Many of their rules make no sense, and can take your life in the wrong direction.*

“Entering the Kingdom of the Heavens” is opening up every area of your life to the Father, and counting on Him for guidance in each of them. In “the Kingdom of the Heavens” the Father is always near, and His personal guidance is better than any list of rules. He will not lead you to break God’s commandments. But He will help you to see when the extra rules are wrong.

Don’t follow rules. Seek to meet the Father in your heart. He knows how you are doing, what you need and how He should guide you. A recurring problem with your heart is that it frequently gets clogged up with the aftereffects of wounds. Healing is a must.

Wounds block the Father’s guidance. You are on your own when you are cut off from His guidance, unable to see whether a particular rule is right. In order for His guidance to work, do not rely on rules but rely on a heart ready to hear from God. His guidance will help you from being directed by wounds like contempt, lust, dishonesty, retaliation and false righteousness. The list could have been longer, no doubt, but in this sermon Jesus explains how these wounds can sneak into your life and clog up your heart.

## CONTEMPT

*21 As you know, it was said long ago, “Do not murder,” and “Whoever murders will not escape judgment.” 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will not escape judgment, anyone who speaks*

contemptuously to his brother should be censured by the elders, and anyone who calls his brother crazy will face hell fire. If anger is the problem you dare not ignore it. It leads to contempt, which can escalate, causing long-lasting family scars. Murder is certainly not where problems start. That is a “rules approach.” You need to deal with anger before it takes over your heart. That is my approach.

<sup>23</sup> Catch contempt problems early. If you are offering a gift to God at the altar and remember that you are having a problem with a brother, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there, work things out with your brother and then offer your gift to God. Eliminating contempt in its early stages, especially in family relationships, is more important than following religious rules.

<sup>25</sup> Here is one more area where contempt can creep into your life – legal matters. Settle things quickly with your adversary so that you are not taken before a judge, who could put you into prison. Contempt can lead to awful outcomes in court. <sup>26</sup> There is nothing worth going to court about if it will jeopardize relationships. Avoid legal fights because they foster long-lasting contempt, and can seriously clog up your heart.

## LUST

<sup>27</sup> It was also said long ago that you should not commit adultery. That is another “rules approach.” Adultery is not where problems begin. <sup>28</sup> Here is my approach. Anyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery in his heart. <sup>29</sup> It is better to gouge your eye out than to let lust lead you to hell. <sup>30</sup> It is better to cut your right hand off than to let lust lead you to hell. Lust can definitely get you into serious trouble. Do whatever it takes to deal with lust, because it can destroy your heart.

<sup>31</sup> It was also said long ago that it is allowed to dismiss your wife if you give her the right kind of divorce certificate. That rule does not deal with the underlying problem – lust. <sup>32</sup> I say that, apart from adultery, you should not simply dismiss your wife, just because you can do so according to your rules. That will certainly lead to lust-related problems for everyone involved. Search your heart before you so easily choose divorce. The Father’s guidance is essential.

## DISHONESTY

<sup>33</sup> It was also said long ago that you should not break an oath that you make to the Lord. We all know that there is a list of rules about how to convince people that you are really telling the truth by stating your oath in just the

right way. That is a bunch of foolishness. <sup>34-35</sup> You should not have to make oaths of any sort. You do not have to swear by heaven or by the earth or by Jerusalem or by anything else in the list of rules about making oaths. <sup>36</sup> You will not seem any more believable just because you follow rules. <sup>37</sup> Here is my approach. You need to be transparently honest. That is all you need to concern yourself with. Integrity comes from the heart, and people will be able to tell whether you are speaking the truth. If you even exaggerate, that is from the evil one. You will not be able to convince people that you are being honest by exaggeration. Your heart will show that through your actions.

## RETALIATION

<sup>38</sup> It was also said that under certain conditions retaliation is allowed. That "rules approach" is wrong. Here is my approach. <sup>39-42</sup> I say that you should not fight back against an evil person. If an evil person strikes you a second time, steals from you a second time, repeatedly pressures you for money or causes you unnecessary physical hardship, do not retaliate. By holding your retaliation in check, an evil person's violence will expose his evil intent for all to see, and you will be totally exonerated. Your steadfast heart will win in the long run, as was mentioned in the third "Beatitude." More importantly, you will promote peace, and the Father will help you with that, as was mentioned in the seventh "Beatitude". Those "Beatitudes" will help you to keep your heart free from retaliation, as you seek the Father's guidance.

<sup>43-45</sup> It was also said, "You should love your neighbor and hate your enemy." If you follow that rule, everyone loses. Here is my approach. I say to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> because that shows you are sons of the Father – you are following His guidance. If you want to show you are sons of the Father, remember this in all of your relationships: God is "perfectly" indiscriminate in being generous to everyone.<sup>2</sup> He pours out plenty of sun and nourishing rain on those who love him as well as on those who don't. <sup>46</sup> If you reserve special favors for those who give you special favors, you are no better than tax collectors, who gouge people's income as a way of life. <sup>47</sup> If you are only nice to your family, you are no better than heathens who do not know God at all. <sup>48</sup> Be "perfectly" equal when it comes to generosity, just like the Father is generous to everyone all of the time. That shows you are following the Father's guidance. You will not be able to deceive anyone about what is really in your heart – retaliation or generosity. It will show. That is how people will be able to tell whether you are a son of the evil one or of the Father who helps you with everything.

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<sup>2</sup> This idea comes from *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, by F. F. Bruce, page 74.

## FALSE RIGHTEOUSNESS

*6:1 Be very careful not to pretend to be a good person, hoping to draw attention to yourself through religious acts that appear “righteous.” You will not fool the Father. He sees your heart, and your empty religious acts will not please Him at all. You will not receive what you expect from Him. Instead, you will lose everything.*

*2 First of all, when you give to the needy do not announce your generosity with trumpets, acting as though you are in a theater production.<sup>3</sup> Your only glory will come from those who pat you on the back for a good performance. 3 Your Father who sees in secret will reward you if you keep quiet about your generous gifts to the poor. 4 In the end, if your heart is indiscriminate when it comes to generosity, you will find favor with God.*

*5 Another example where false righteousness can mislead you is in your prayer life. You will not gain God's favor with theater-like productions when you pray, whether in church or out in public. Your only reward will be whatever glory you receive because you performed well. 6 Instead, avoid showing off when you pray. It is best to be completely alone. The Father who sees you in secret will repay you for your heart's prayers – those that are directed to Him, without seeking anyone's approval. If your heart is truly seeking God you will not be seeking people's attention through acts of false righteousness.*

The wealth of knowledge about the heart that Jesus shares here is truly vast. His words open a door to see the heart at the deepest level ever revealed. It is where people meet God. Jesus makes it very clear that the heart is a battleground, and your identity will go to the victor. If you lose a battle to hopelessness, contempt, lust, dishonesty, retaliation or false righteousness, you will be acting like somebody who does not even know the Father. His guidance would not lead you to act like that. Any time you lose control, and are blocked from receiving His guidance, that shows you are in the middle of a heart battle.

Please take a look at an example which Jesus used in the “Contempt” section, where He highlighted a particular heart battle. If you completely lose it with your brother, call him names and viciously tell him you hope you never see him again, that fit of nastiness will change you at your core. You will not feel like the same person afterwards. Unresolved contempt toward him will seethe from everything you say, and you could very well turn into a totally nasty person. You could

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<sup>3</sup> The word here that is translated “a hypocrite” can also mean “an actor”.

become like someone who does not even know God. When you lose heart battles like this, not only do you forget who you are, but things may escalate and you may eventually lose control of your whole life. Your identity truly is at stake in heart battles. Jesus spoke about heart battles in urgent terms. Apart from the Father's help, the battles will surely be lost.

It is becoming more obvious, as Jesus continues, that preparing your heart can be a long-term project. There is often a lot of healing and transformation ahead, and that can take quite a while. Winning each battle is crucial, but winning the war for your heart may find you fighting many battles, and that will require devotion and unwavering commitment.

Jesus is asking his listeners, "Who are you really? Are you going to let hopelessness, contempt, lust, dishonesty, retaliation and false righteousness tell you who you are? If so, that is living from your hurt. You know that you have problems in at least some of those areas. Are you tired of losing heart battles? You need to start talking things over with the Father. He will be your constant companion as you learn to live from a transformed heart."

## TALKING THINGS OVER WITH THE FATHER

As is the case for Middle Eastern teachings from those days, the main point for this sermon comes in the center. This is strikingly different from our literature, where the main point is most often found at the end. Jesus profoundly hits His stride right here, in the middle of His teaching, and makes a sermon summary in what we have called, *The Lord's Prayer*. He teaches about talking with the Father who is always near.

*The Lord's Prayer* includes some topics already mentioned: The Father is always near; honor is to go to Him, not to us; we are to let Him guide everything in life; and He can help with our heart battles. This prayer also includes some growth areas soon to appear in the sermon, including forgiveness, peacefulness and developing loving relationships. These are areas to talk over with the Father on a regular basis. That is essential. You will either talk with Him about them as they come up, or you will not be able to put these teachings into practice. Your heart will need some gentle assistance while being transformed. His companionship is the key.

*6:7 When you pray do not act like those who know nothing about the Father's guidance. They do not grasp how to pray. They believe that if they pray long enough, they will eventually get through to God. 8 You do not have to pray like that, because your Father knows what you need before you ask. You can go directly to the right issues with Him. 9 Here is how to pray.*

## “THE LORD’S PRAYER”

*“Our Father, always near, help us to constantly dwell on Your holy name, on Your gracious character and on Your majesty.\* 10 Let Your Kingdom gain control in every area of our lives. Provide direction for us here on earth, as You provide direction in heaven. 11 Help us to rely on Your generosity each day. 12 Forgive our offenses in the same way that we have forgiven others. 13 Please do not lead us toward temptation but rescue us from evil.”*

\* In Jesus’ culture, to utter the *name* of God caused people to pause and think deeply, because it was much more than a title. To mention His *name* included dwelling on His wonderful traits and on everything that He stands for. Perhaps you can see how very holy it was and how introspective people needed to be to speak His *name*. In fact, it was prohibited to utter His *name* without fully giving Him His due respect. Translating this prayer into words that convey the original meaning will need to include this broader understanding of His *name*. Thus, “your *name*” is translated, “your holy name, your gracious character and your majesty.” That is how people heard this prayer.

## “THE LORD’S PRAYER” PERSONALIZED

Dear Father, always near, help me to constantly dwell on Your holy name, on Your gracious character and on Your majesty. Let Your Kingdom gain control in every area of my life. Remind me to talk everything over with You. Provide direction for me here on earth, as You provide direction in heaven. Help me to rely on Your generosity each day. Forgive my offenses in the same way that I have forgiven others. My heart struggles to stay pure, so please do not lead me toward temptation but rescue me from evil.

At this point in His sermon Jesus has opened up His ideas about the nearness of the Father and about receiving His guidance, especially in the middle of heart battles. Six areas of woundedness have been described, which can block His voice. There have also been plenty of reminders that the Father’s presence is wonderful, and we have just heard Jesus describe how important it is to talk everything over with the Father, our constant companion. Jesus now turns His attention from overcoming heart wounds to living a better life, which is possible when wounds no longer stand in the way. During the rest of the sermon He presents practical growth areas, along with some “here and now” guidance from the Father. That is what it takes to “put His teaching into practice.” Jesus first turns to forgiveness.

# LIVING FROM A TRANSFORMED HEART

## FORGIVENESS AND YOUR HEART

*14 If you forgive others when they sin against you, your Father who is right by your side will forgive you. 15 If you do not forgive the offenses of others, He will not forgive your offenses. He knows whether you have a forgiving heart, and cannot guide you if your heart is tainted with unforgiveness.*

Forgiveness does not start with “how to forgive.” It starts with overcoming spiritual brokenness, and that takes us back to the first *Beatitude*. After we have welcomed the Father to help us with our spiritual brokenness, we will be ready for Him to help us with retaliation urges. Then we will be ready for His help with forgiving others.

Here is a major sticking point in thinking correctly about forgiveness. When someone has wrongly inflicted pain it will interfere with the wounded person’s life until the wound has been healed. That unhealed wound can cause a heart to remain unsettled, due to pain and the resulting urges to retaliate. Healing must take place or the festering wound that urges retaliation can block forgiveness. In such a case, the person can falsely believe that because the pain is still high, forgiveness has not yet been reached. It is correct to understand that even though the pain is still present, forgiveness has been reached when the person refuses to retaliate.

Here is a second sticking point. Often people do not have a workable definition for forgiveness. That creates a lot of confusion. Here is the best definition I have heard: “Forgiveness is not a feeling. It is the decision to not retaliate.” With this definition in mind, you can see the progression that Jesus is outlining. People can start by inviting the Father to help them with their spiritual brokenness, and then with His guidance they can seek healing for the wounds that urge retaliation. That clears the way to receive the Father’s guidance for daily relationship issues.

As you can see, the hillside gathering was not ready to hear about forgiveness before they had learned these two earlier lessons: The Father is available, and you need to know how to talk things over with the Father in order to win heart battles. It is not coincidental that the forgiveness section of this sermon directly follows those lessons. Living with the Father’s guidance leads to success in forgiveness. If you are stuck in retaliation mode, that probably means you are living from your hurt. Your heart will need some healing before the Father’s guidance can be re-established.

## GENUINENESS AND YOUR HEART

*16 Do not make a big theatrical production about how much you suffer when you fast, or the audience's approval will be your only reward. Drawing attention to yourself is foolish, and trying to look good never works. 17-18 Do not fast in order to look religious. When you fast be as cheerful as possible, so that no one will know when you are fasting. The Father who sees everything will reward you. He knows what is in your heart. You do not have to impress Him by acting religious.*

*19 You have a lot of heart work ahead if you are devoted to collecting treasures here on earth. Those treasures will eventually be destroyed by moths or rust, or they may be stolen by thieves. They will soon be worthless, and nobody will be impressed. 20 You should be devoted to collecting treasures in heaven. Seek whatever has eternal value. 21 You will not be able to hide what is in your heart. People will be able to see what you really collect – external treasures or eternal treasures.*

*22 You also have a lot of heart work ahead if you are not genuine about your devotion to God in every area of your life. 23 Your outlook always needs to be attuned to whatever has eternal value. How great is the darkness that comes when your outlook is tainted with evil.*

*24 This is what you need to know about genuineness and your heart: Nobody can serve two masters. You will not fool people with appearances, whether you try to act religious or attain great wealth. Your heart will declare who you are. Be genuine. If you are devoted to appearances, do not think for a moment that your heart is okay. You cannot serve the master of appearances and the master who sees your heart. It does not work to live your life in the light only part of the time.*

## PEACEFULNESS AND YOUR HEART

Jesus next turns to worry, building on His prayer and *The Beatitudes*: The Father is ready to help, so rely on Him all of the time. Overcoming hopelessness is a second earlier idea that helps us deal with worry. Now we are ready for His guidance.

*25 Worry will not lead you to anything that has eternal value. To worry about your life – what you eat and what you wear – will get you nowhere. Your life is more important than externals, like food and clothes, for example.*

*26 Do not worry about your life. Look at the birds around you. They get along just fine relying on God's care. They do not spend their lives worrying about*

food, preparing for an uncertain future, yet the Father takes care of them. Can you not see that the Father who is always at your side places a much higher value on you than on birds? You need to learn to count on Him. He will provide for you.

<sup>27</sup> Do not worry about how you look. Can any of you grow a single inch taller by worrying? <sup>28</sup> Or take this as another example. What good can come from worrying about wearing the right clothes? They are external. The lilies of the field illustrate God's care. <sup>29</sup> Solomon himself was not that well dressed! <sup>30</sup> If God provides those lilies as a beautiful covering for the grasses of the field, which are here today and gone tomorrow, can you not trust that He will provide a suitable covering for you? Your faith must be really small if you cannot believe that He will provide for you.

<sup>31</sup> Do not worry about food and clothing. <sup>32</sup> People who do not know about the Father's guidance seek after those things, but He is right beside you and knows just what you need. <sup>33</sup> Seek to be constantly in His presence. He will help you make good decisions each day.

<sup>34</sup> It all comes down to believing that the Father will generously take care of you. Do not worry at all about tomorrow, even though you could find enough evil to worry about in every "tomorrow" if you tried. Drop your worries. You can rely on Him to take care of you.

## LOVING RELATIONSHIPS AND YOUR HEART

Jesus' ideas continue to build. What He has said about forgiveness, genuineness and worry are developed further in this "Loving Relationships" section. These teachings all help with the daily life problems that complicate relationships.

<sup>7:1-2</sup> When you judge others as being inferior, you are the inferior one. It is better to honestly work on your own spiritual brokenness, so that you will bring humility into relationships. Judging people pushes them away.

<sup>3</sup> Look at your own faults, not others.' When you are critical of the sawdust speck in your brother's eye, you may as well have a whole wooden beam in your own eye. <sup>4-5</sup> How ridiculous it is to try to help your brother with a speck in his eye while a beam is in yours! Take charge of your own life, not others.' Keep your heart healthy and you will be able to relate more deeply.

<sup>6</sup> Be careful not to push religion on people. In all of your relationships preserve what is holy, but do not fight with people about who is right. As the last "Beatitude" points out, you may very well be persecuted. Pushiness

could get out of hand – as dangerous as trying to recover a holy book from a pack of vicious dogs, or salvage precious pearls from a herd of swine. You could be seriously persecuted – torn to pieces. Try not to be too confrontational when sharing my teaching.

*7-8 It is far better to build your relationships on authentic qualities. You will find fulfillment in relationships that are based on a deep interest in each other. Be up front and clear, and ask people for what you need. That is a trustworthy approach. And seek to cooperate with them. That is also good. And knock on their door – take initiative. Make things happen. These are trustworthy principles that will help you build loving relationships.*

*9-11 Do not try to manipulate people. Seek the Father's help to stay honest in your relationships. Follow His example. He is not like a father who would fool his son. Like when a boy asks for bread, a father could put a smooth, round stone on his plate, trying to fool him a little, and tell him it is a roll. Or when a boy asks for a fish to eat, he could try to fool him by giving him a snake. What kind of a father would mislead his son like that? Even the worst parents know how to give good gifts to their children. The Father who is always near will surely not fool you when you call out to Him. You can rely on Him to provide answers for tough relationship questions.*

*12 It is crucial to treat people in a way that does not make them feel inferior, yet recognizes that if you confront them, things could get out of hand. Understanding people correctly is the key. Here is a guiding principle that will help you to be consistent, and will help you to live in accordance with the law and the prophets. "Always treat others in the way that you would like to be treated."*

## SINCERITY AND YOUR HEART

*13-14 Accept my challenge to invite the Father into every area of your life. A far better life is within your grasp, because you have heard my message. But there are very few people who follow it. They are like people who enter by a narrow gate. Most people take the easy way – they enter through a wide gate. If you miss the narrow gate you will not be on the road that leads to a better life. You will be on the wide road that leads to destruction.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> This passage is often believed to be a teaching about going to heaven or hell. It is significant to note that those words do not appear. The "narrow road" metaphor suggests He is asking whether we are really willing to take His teaching seriously. Staying on "the narrow road" is like this sermon's closing metaphor, which challenges people to build their lives on a solid rock.

*15 But even if you enter by the narrow gate you will need to be careful. Watch out for false teachers. They are like wolves in sheep's clothing. You will be able to tell that they are false because of their greed. That will reveal what is in their hearts. 16 If you inspect a piece of fruit you will know what kind of a tree it came from. You do not pick grapes from a thorn bush, nor figs from a thistle bush. 17-20 Good fruit comes from good trees, and corrupt fruit comes from evil trees. Corrupt trees are worthless. They need to be chopped down and burned. False prophets' greed will show people the truth about their hearts. Get rid of them. Like bad apples, they are rotten to the core, and could spoil your whole crop. Do not spend any time with them.*

*21 You also need to watch out for people who falsely say that they have entered by the narrow gate. Not everyone who addresses me as "Lord" will enter the Kingdom of the Heavens, letting the Father guide every area of their life. Many such people seem to get it right on the outside but completely miss that their deceitful hearts are transparent to the world. They do not fool anyone but themselves. Their lives tell everyone exactly where their hearts are.*

*22 I know who is merely pretending to live from a pure heart. When judgment day comes many people will say to me that they were prophesying in my name, casting out demons in my name and were performing mighty miracles in my name. 23 But I will tell them, very plainly, that I never knew them and they must face judgment. They were devoted to themselves, hiding their selfish hearts behind the appearance of good behavior. They will not be able to hide from the Father on judgment day.*

## A TRANSFORMED HEART

*24-27 Here is a closing picture for you. It is not enough if you just hear my words. You must put them into practice. When your life shows that you have heard my words, that will make you like a wise home builder. 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.*

*28 When Jesus had finished, the people were astounded. His authority was unsurpassed.*