



THE TEACHINGS

of

Jesus

MIKE MURPHY

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First Edition

ISBN-13: 978-0-578-49266-7

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Published by What Does It Mean to Serve God Books

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Introduction](#)

[Who is Jesus?](#)

[Temptation](#)

[Born Again](#)

[Truth and Light](#)

[Living Water](#)

[Jesus is Lord](#)

[Salt & Light](#)

[A Gift from God](#)

[The Law](#)

[For the Right Reasons](#)

[The Lord's Prayer](#)

[Your Treasure](#)

[Trust the Pilot](#)

[The Plank in Your Eye](#)

[Rock Foundation](#)

[The Harvest Field](#)

[Sharing the Good News](#)

[My Yoke is Light](#)

[Resurrection](#)

[Bible Study](#)

[Germination](#)

[Weeds](#)

[One Man](#)

[Bread Making](#)

[A Fine Treasure](#)

[Panning for Gold](#)

[Humility](#)

[What Matters](#)

[Forgiven](#)

[Deception](#)

[The Enemy](#)

[Greed](#)

[Ready to Serve](#)

[The True Vine](#)

[Summary of His Teaching](#)

Introduction

The Bible is the most important document known to mankind. Within the pages of the Bible we learn about our Creator, we learn about the battle between good and evil, and we learn about our Savior, Jesus Christ. Every page of the Bible is important; however, there is one element in the Bible that stands out as the most important instruction ever recorded – that is the teachings of Jesus.

The Old Testament of the Bible delivers a stern message of an awesome God who demands righteousness. Over and over again, human frailty prevented mankind from achieving the righteousness God was seeking. God allowed humanity to stumble for hundreds of years in order to establish, without a doubt, our inability to achieve the righteousness of God. The only way to achieve the righteousness God demands is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

Romans 3:22

It is through faith in Jesus Christ that we achieve the righteousness required by God to overcome our selfish human nature and become children of God. By trusting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are once again granted eternal life as God first intended for us. We become free from the devil’s curse and are subsequently focused on following in the footsteps of Jesus.

If you’ve never studied the Bible from cover-to-cover and feel intimidated by the thought of taking on what is in some ways a difficult task, this collection of devotionals on the teachings of Jesus is a wonderful starting point. If you’re a seasoned Bible study veteran, this specific study on the teachings of Jesus is an excellent way to fine-tune your understanding and perhaps open your eyes to some of the deeper truths you have not yet fully grasped.

Everyone will benefit from this study on the teachings of Jesus. Each lesson is delivered in a brief devotional that is intended to be a starting point for your own exploration. I encourage you to have a Bible with you as you read so that you can investigate each verse provided in context. As a result, you will create your own impression that should be documented in a journal or in the margins of your Bible. The Word of God is a living document and will speak directly to you, providing personal insight that can only come from your own one-on-one encounter.

By compiling most of the important teachings of Jesus into one source, I’ve provided you with a shortcut to truth. This collection of devotionals will direct you right to the heart of the Bible – the teachings of Jesus.

Who is Jesus?

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, conceived in the womb of a woman chosen by God to be his mother. This kind of miraculous birth had never been seen before and has never been seen since.

“God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Luke 1:26-33

The Childhood of Jesus

The Bible doesn’t tell us much about the childhood of Jesus. There is one significant incident that happens when he is twelve years old. After attending the Passover festival in Jerusalem with his parents, he is somehow left behind. Mary and Joseph don’t realize he is not in the group they are traveling with until the next day. By the time they get back to Jerusalem, Jesus has been on his own for three days and he is a source of amazement for the Jewish teachers.

“After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”

Luke 2:46-47

Somehow Jesus, at the age of twelve, had mastered the Old Testament teachings and was able to hold his own with the teachers in Jerusalem. After this, there is no more record of the life of Jesus until he begins his ministry at the age of around 30 years. That’s a substantial gap in the record. We have no idea what went on in the life of Jesus throughout his teenage years and all through his twenties. We know he was already a master teacher of the Jewish Bible at the age of twelve. It is more that twenty-five years after his encounter at the temple in Jerusalem that the story of the life of Jesus returns to the pages of the Bible.

The Ministry of Jesus Begins

A man named John, who came to be known as John the Baptist, was sent by God to usher in the ministry of Jesus. John traveled around encouraging people to turn away from sin. As a symbol

of this new beginning, he would immerse them in water; then lift them out of the water to a new life focused on living for God rather than selfish desires.

*“And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness,
preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”*

Mark 1:4

John the Baptist knew God was sending the Messiah, the Savior of the world, but he did not know where or when. This understanding was part of the message John delivered as he baptized those who came to hear him teach.

*“And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I,
the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.
I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*

Mark 1:7-8

As predicted, Jesus eventually arrived on the scene as John was carrying out his teaching and baptizing converts in the Jordan River. John had no trouble identifying Jesus as the Son of God as soon as he stepped on the scene.

*“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said,
“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!
This is the one I meant when I said,
‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”*

John 1:29-30

Jesus approached John and requested to be baptized, but John told Jesus he did not feel worthy; nevertheless, Jesus insisted and John fulfilled his duty. Jesus began his ministry by being baptized. John and the others in attendance then witnessed an astonishingly miraculous event.

*“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.
At that moment heaven was opened,
and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.
And a voice from heaven said,
“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*

Matthew 3:16-17

While this may not be easy to fully understand, Jesus Christ is a human manifestation of God. Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus is an extension of God. Jesus and God are one and the same.

*“No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son,
who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father,
has made him known.”*

John 1:18

Jesus Delivers His Message

Over the next three years, Jesus traveled from town to town performing miraculous healings and delivering the most important instructions ever provided to humanity. The deity of Jesus was absolutely, without question, confirmed by the extraordinary powers he exhibited. Jesus made the blind see, he released people from years of demonic possession, and in some cases he brought the dead back to life. Only God could perform miracles like this.

Oddly enough, the obvious deity of Jesus did not sit well with the religious leaders of that time. The religious leaders during the ministry of Jesus were blinded by their own self-importance. The devil had allowed them to become so powerful in their authority they had lost sight of God and were now consumed by their need to maintain that power. Jesus was God in the flesh standing right in front of them but they could not see him. Instead, they felt threatened by his presence and chose to believe his miracles were some kind of trick rather than the awesome demonstration of the power of God that they truly were. As a result, the religious leaders plotted to kill Jesus.

“Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.” Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.”

John 11:47-53

On the Way to the Cross

Once the plot to kill Jesus was set into motion, the ministry of Jesus continued as usual with Jesus using his miraculous powers to stay one step ahead of his potential assassins. Jesus was fully aware of his need to die on the cross for our sins, but he was not going to allow that to happen until the appropriate time – Jesus selected the time for the crucifixion.

*Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them,
“We are going up to Jerusalem,
and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.
He will be delivered over to the Gentiles.
They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him.
On the third day he will rise again.”*

Luke 18:31-33

This all happened just as Jesus predicted. He was indeed crucified, placed in a tomb, and then rose again on the third day. The risen Jesus appeared to hundreds over the next 40 days before ascending into heaven to take his place at the right hand of God.

*“After Jesus said this, he was taken up before their very eyes,
and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

*They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going,
when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.*

“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky?

*This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven,
will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*

Acts 1:9-11

Waiting for the Return of Jesus

This astonishing account of God walking the earth as a man is the foundation of the Christian faith. Jesus was crucified as payment for our sins so that we might have eternal life. Those who believe and put their faith in him, turning from their selfish desires, and focusing their life on follow the teachings of Jesus, are recognized to be children of God.

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

John 3:16

God has provided us with this means to escape our death sentence imposed upon us by the deception of the devil that lures us into sinful selfish desire. Our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior is the means of our salvation.

*“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,”
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.*

*For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified,
and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”*

Romans 10:9-10

An honest and sincere profession of faith is manifested by a changed life focused on following the teachings of Jesus. If we truly believe, we will be obsessed with seeking the light of Jesus in every aspect of our life. We are greatly blessed in these modern times to have access to the Word of God. We can easily open the pages of the Bible and read exactly what Jesus taught during his ministry here in this world.

Reading the Teachings of Jesus

In the pages that follow, I have selected some of the most important teachings of Jesus, starting with the early days of his ministry right up until the end. This series of devotionals is intended to help you clearly identify the specific lessons Jesus is providing in each example. I would encourage you to focus on the scripture rather than my words of explanation that are only meant to be a guide into a deeper understanding. Seek the assistance of the Holy Spirit before you read each devotional and take some time to fully absorb that teaching before you move on to the next. Sometimes the lessons Jesus provides are plainly obvious and easy to apply; other times, the lessons are complex and may take days to fully digest. This is the Word of God, and it will penetrate deep into your soul and speak directly to you in a personal way if you open your heart and listen carefully for the voice of God. May you be greatly blessed as you study the teachings of Jesus.

Temptation

Before Jesus began His ministry here in this world, He spent time in the desert fasting and praying. During this time, Satan came to tempt Jesus with three weaknesses of mankind.

“For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.”

1 John 2:16

These are three tools the devil uses to manipulate all of us – the lust of the flesh – the lust of the eyes – the pride of life. Of course, Jesus could not be tempted by the devil, and the way he responded to Satan is a profound lesson we all need to consider.

Satan began his assault on Jesus by appealing to His hunger – the lust of the flesh. Having fasted for many days, Jesus would have had a strong desire to satisfy the need for food. Standing firm against the devil’s attack, Jesus quoted scripture (*Deuteronomy 8:3*).

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Matthew 4:4

We all have our own cravings to fulfill the desires of our bodies that we must deal with on a daily basis. Jesus is teaching us that we are not only sustained by food, we are completely sustained by God. First and foremost in our life is our duty to God.

Satan’s second assault on Jesus was a test of his pride of life. The devil challenged Jesus to demonstrate the power of God. Again, Jesus answered the devil with a quote from the Bible (*Deuteronomy 6:16*).

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Matthew 4:7

We all have talents and skills that we depend on to help us get through life. The devil often uses those abilities against us by stimulating our pride. It feels good to be the best at something and the devil knows how to use that weakness to push us away from God.

Jesus had no reason to prove the power of God – that power is an absolute certainty and in no need of proof. If we are likewise certain of our own abilities, there will be no need to show off or seek ungodly attention to prove our superiority. We are not to trust in our own abilities – we are to trust in God.

Satan's final assault on Jesus targeted the lust of the eyes. Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if He would only worship the devil. Of course, Jesus responded by quoting scripture (*Deuteronomy 6:13*).

*Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written:
'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"
Matthew 4:10*

We all have cravings to attain greater material wealth. Who doesn't want a bigger house, a new car, or a larger bank account? These things are not in any way evil unless you have made a decision to use the devil's assistance to acquire them. The devil is clever and will make following him seem like an honest way to get ahead in life; be careful, seek first God's direction and plan your life based on that instruction.

Jesus stood His ground against Satan by depending on the Word of God. We need to follow that precise plan of action as we encounter the devil in our own lives. Submission to the Word of God is how we stay connected to the will of God. Once Satan realized he had no useful avenue of attack against Jesus, he walked away.

*"Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."
Matthew 4:11*

Jesus demonstrated for us the best way to keep the devil at bay is to stand firmly on the Word of God. If we consider carefully what God wants from us, it is unlikely the devil will have any room to squeeze his way into our life. Stay in the Word and the Word will stay in you, protecting you from the schemes of the devil.

Born Again

One of the Jewish leaders, a man named Nicodemus, came to visit with Jesus one evening. It's not clear if he came in the night so no one else would see him, or if this just happened to be the time when Jesus was available. What is clear is he was curious to know more about the teachings of Jesus. Jesus had been performing many miracles and Nicodemus was convinced these were supernatural acts empowered by God.

“He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

John 3:2

Most of the Jewish leaders were intimidated by Jesus and felt threatened by his growing popularity. They feared they would be robbed of their power and their control. Nicodemus was different, he had an open mind. He was ready to learn from Jesus. His primary concern was how to get into the coming kingdom of God. The answer Jesus provided was surprising.

*Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you,
no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”*

John 3:3

The concept of being born again was lost on Nicodemus. As a Jew, Nicodemus believed he was entitled to enter the kingdom of God because of his genealogy and his constant adherence to the Jewish law. Trusting the intellectual prowess of Nicodemus, Jesus attempted to fill in the gaps in his understanding.

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”

John 3:5-6

Jesus was essentially telling Nicodemus his earthly birth; that of his “flesh,” was not enough to carry him into the kingdom of God; he would also need a spiritual birth. Jesus was telling Nicodemus that you must be sinless to enter the kingdom of God, and no human father can transmit a sinless genealogy. Only Jesus, the Son of God, can transmit a sinless nature to His children.

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.”

John 3:13

Nicodemus was sitting with the one and only person who could provide him with the key to the kingdom of God.

“So the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”
John 3:14-15

Jesus was giving Nicodemus the simple message that he only needed to believe – he only needed to confess his sins and trust Jesus to be born again.

And so we are brought to this very familiar verse known throughout the world.

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*
John 3:16

Nicodemus came to Jesus because he could not deny the spirit of God was working through Him as he performed His miracles. It was now time for Nicodemus to trust that same spirit to provide his salvation and be born again.

Truth and Light

Jesus made it clear from the beginning of His ministry what His mission was and how He expected people to respond. Jesus was brought into the world by God and is the crowning achievement in His enormously complex plan to save mankind. God is working every moment of every day to bring about the kingdom of God. His intentions are revealed in the pages of the Bible and were brought to life through Jesus Christ.

God loves the world so much He sent His Son to die for the sins of the world so that we might all have eternal life. Jesus came to save us.

*“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but to save the world through him.”*

John 3:17

We were all condemned to die way back in the book of Genesis (*Genesis 2:17*). Before that death sentence, we were all scheduled to have eternal life. Jesus came to restore that benefit. His simple message is to believe in Him – to trust his path to salvation.

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

John 3:18

The problem many people have is their obsession with sin. Jesus is a bright light. Some people avoid Jesus because they do not want that bright light to expose their sin.

*“Everyone who does evil hates the light,
and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.”*

John 3:20

Conversely, those who believe in truth cherish light. Entrance into the kingdom of God is illuminated by the light of truth. Jesus Christ is a lighthouse beacon directing willing souls into the kingdom of God.

*“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly
that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”*

John 3:21

Light or darkness; it’s a choice we all have to make. For some, this is an easy and obvious choice. For others, selfish pride bolstered by the devil makes the decision difficult, or simply keeps them going in the wrong direction. There’s a battle going on here and we all need to stand

on our own two feet when choosing sides. There is no coercion on the part of our Lord – He’s made the offer and it’s up to us to move toward the light.

Living Water

During His ministry, Jesus had to work through some long standing prejudice. For various reasons Jews did not associate with Samaritans. In addition, Jews believed men should avoid social contact with women to avoid ceremonial defilement. Nevertheless, when Jesus found himself alone with a Samaritan woman, He engaged her in a conversation and asked her for help getting a drink from the well. The woman was shocked and couldn't believe a Jewish man was speaking with her.

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

John 4:10

Jesus was essentially calling Himself a "gift of God" while making reference to His supernatural powers. The woman realized Jesus was making supernatural claims and was skeptical. Jesus went on to give her a more complete picture of what He had to offer.

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst."

Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 4:13-14

Of course this woman wanted to be relieved of the burden of traveling to the well for water every day and she let Jesus know she was ready to receive His living water. In order for the woman to better understand exactly what He was offering, Jesus revealed some information about her personal life that would have been impossible for Him to know.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband."

The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.

What you have just said is quite true."

John 4:17-18

Now the supernatural powers of Jesus were on full display and the woman believed Jesus was sent by God. She was now concerned about her place of worship. The Samaritans worshiped God in the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim. The Jews worshiped God in the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus made it clear there is no specific place needed to worship God. God is everywhere.

"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."

John 4:23

This caused the woman to recall she had heard the Messiah was supposed to come and explain everything regarding God, and Jesus made it clear the Messiah had come.

*Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."
John 4:26*

Leaving her water jar behind, the woman went into town to share this amazing news. Before long, Jesus had a crowd of Samaritans to speak to and He stayed with them two days. Christ proclaimed His message of salvation and many Samaritans came to believe.

*They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."
John 4:42*

Jesus had offered Himself as Messiah-Savior to the Samaritans and many were eager to drink from the well of living water.

Jesus is Lord

Jesus often healed people on the Sabbath which enraged the Jewish leaders. In His own defense, Jesus told the Jewish leaders that God is always working.

*In his defense Jesus said to them,
“My Father is always at his work to this very day,
and I too am working.”*

John 5:17

Of course, when he referred to God as His very own Father, this only made things worse. The Jewish leaders believed this to be blasphemy – punishable by death. Indeed, Jesus claimed to be equal with God.

*“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life,
even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.”*

John 5:21

In addition, Jesus claimed to have been given authority by God to judge all men. He also made it clear to the Jewish leaders that rejection of Him was a rejection of God.

*“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,
that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.*

Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.”

John 5:22-23

To prove the truth of his statements, Jesus provided the Jewish leaders with five witnesses to His claim. John the Baptist testified concerning Christ (*John 5:33-35*). The miracles Christ performed were witness to His power (*John 5:36*). The Father Himself was a witness at the baptism of Jesus (*Mark 1:11*). The Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah were a witness (*John 5:39*). And finally, Jesus said that Moses was a witness (*Deuteronomy 18:15*).

Jesus made a substantial case for his deity to the Jewish leaders and the remainder of the New Testament provides us with an overwhelming revelation of the truth – Jesus is Lord (*Romans 6:23*).

*“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*

John 5:24

Salt & Light

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have a particular influence on this world that needs to be nurtured and maintained. Jesus made this clear during His Sermon on the Mount. He used two specific illustrations to paint a graphic picture of our responsibility as His disciples.

“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 underfoot.”

Matthew 5:13

In Biblical times salt was used to stimulate thirst in an effort to ensure the proper consumption of fluids. Jesus was letting believers know that through their words and actions they are to create a thirst in others to know the Lord. He concluded his statement by making the point that without that “saltiness” believers are worthless. This makes it imperative for believers to maintain a constant witness through Christ-like behavior.

Jesus went on to describe believers as light in the midst of darkness. The joyous spirit of believers along with their good deeds reveals the truth of the gospel.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”

Matthew 5:14

Indeed, it is not possible to hide the radiance of a true believer. Jesus was telling those listening that His followers should share the gospel with the world. Christianity is not something you hide in a closet or cover with a blanket.

“Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”

Matthew 5:15

Followers of Jesus Christ have been blessed and are expected to let others know they can be blessed as well. The gospel is a message of hope for all and should be shared at every opportunity. As a believer, what you say and how you act, should lead others to Jesus and glorify your heavenly Father.

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 5:16

A Gift from God

Soon after Jesus appointed His twelve apostles, He appeared before a large crowd and delivered His first recorded sermon known as the Sermon on the Mount. Many people were aware of the miracles Jesus was performing and were eager to hear Him teach. The message Jesus delivered was centered on the understanding that righteousness was needed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The Jewish religious leaders known as the Pharisees also taught that righteousness was needed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven; however, they believed righteousness was attained by observing rituals and traditions. Jesus came to deliver righteousness as a gift from God to those who placed their faith in Him.

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:20

The Sermon on the Mount begins with a list of statements that begin with the phrase “*Blessed are the,*” which are commonly referred to as the Beatitudes. Jesus uses this starting point to identify the characteristics of a righteous person and the blessings that follow.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:3

Jesus begins with the foundation from which all righteousness flows. Those who are “*poor in spirit*” have come to realize they have no righteousness and therefore need to depend on God to supply their need.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Matthew 5:4

Unlike the Pharisees who believed they were without sin, a truly righteous person will “*mourn*” the presence of sin and therefore find comfort in God.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

Matthew 5:5

The unrighteous believe they can do everything on their own. The righteous are the “*meek*” that are willing to submit to the authority of God.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Matthew 5:6

If you have an appetite for a deeper understanding and relationship with God, you are on your way to righteousness.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

Matthew 5:7

The Pharisees did not believe they had a responsibility to help the less fortunate because they believed their troubles were punishment from God. Jesus taught the exact opposite. True righteousness is exemplified by genuine concern for others.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

Matthew 5:8

Entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven requires conformity to the holiness of God, which is unattainable through human effort. God’s unchangeable, unalterable, absolute holiness can only be attained as a gift from God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Matthew 5:9

The first step in becoming a “*peacemaker*” is to find peace with God. Those who have trusted the message of Jesus are those who have found peace with God and are therefore “*called children of God.*”

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Matthew 5:10

Finally, Jesus made the point that following Him would mean that the unrighteous would turn against you. Jesus taught that those who were willing to stand with Him and therefore stand against unrighteousness, would find their way into the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Pharisees believed they could work their way into the Kingdom of Heaven through their own power and observance of religious rituals and traditions. Jesus came to let us know that righteousness can only be attained through the absolute, unalterable holiness of God and is delivered as a gift to those who put their faith in Him (*Ephesians 2:8-9*).

“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.”

Matthew 5:12

The Law

Most cities have speed laws for motor vehicles. The letter of the law is to maintain a certain speed when driving. The spirit of the law is to drive at a safe speed so as not to endanger anyone. If the speed limit is 45 mph, and you see large group of school children walking along the sidewalk on both sides of the street, you would not be violating the law to continue driving at 45 mph; however, slowing down to maintain safety would fulfill the spirit of the law. When Jesus delivered His Sermon on the Mount, he made it clear that the spirit of the law was far more important than the letter of the law.

*“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.”*

Matthew 5:17

On the other hand, the Jewish religious leaders known as the Pharisees were so fixated on the letter of the law, they had codified them into 365 prohibitions and 248 commandments. Followers of the Pharisees were shackled to a list of laws that intruded on every aspect of their lives. Their goal was righteousness; however, Jesus demonstrated that a critical ingredient was missing from their laws – the spirit of the law was being neglected.

*“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the
Pharisees and the teachers of the law,
you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Matthew 5:20

The Pharisees believed that as long as one did not take another man’s life, he was innocent of breaking the law that states “do not murder.” Jesus focused on the spirit of the law by explaining the action is not the crime – the crime is the intent of the heart.

“But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.”

Matthew 5:22

Essentially, the “do not murder” law is fundamentally a reflection of God’s command to love one another. If the heart is focused on love, it is impossible to murder. Jesus tells us that once we have become angry we have already stepped beyond the spirit of the law and committed an offense. As a result, the Pharisaic interpretation of the law of murder does not fulfill the righteousness of God.

Jesus made a similar distinction in the case of adultery.

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’
But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully
has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

Matthew 5:27-28

Jesus also punctuated the spirit of the divorce laws.

*“But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife,
except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery,
and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”*

Matthew 5:32

Jesus taught that one is not to stand on the letter of the law but that righteousness will compel someone to go well beyond what the law requires.

“If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.”

Matthew 5:41

Jesus taught that true righteousness will be exemplified by having love for your enemies.

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’
But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”*

Matthew 5:43-45

If we love only those who love in return, we are being selfish and are not fulfilling the demands of the holiness of God. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus demonstrated that the Pharisaic interpretation of the law was lacking a true understanding of the spirit of the law. God is concerned most with the attitude of the heart.

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:48 (NIV)

Our human frailty is not capable of achieving these high standards. We cannot in our own power achieve perfection. The point Jesus is making in His Sermon on the Mount is not that we need to add another list of prohibitions and commandments – the point He is making is that the only way to be acceptable to God is by placing your faith in Jesus Christ. Only Jesus can provide the kind of transformation that will make an individual acceptable to God. Turn from your sin and follow Jesus, is the message.

*“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out,
that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”*

Acts 3:19 (NIV)

For the Right Reasons

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus rejected the interpretation of the law held by the Jewish religious leaders known as the Pharisees. By focusing on the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law, the Pharisees had gone off in the wrong direction with endless rules and regulations, rather than focusing on their heart which is the central focus of God. In like manner, the Pharisees also had a tendency to make a big show of their every action in order to gain approval from others. Jesus made a point to shine a light on this practice in His Sermon on the Mount.

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 6:1

One of the ways the Pharisees were guilty of practicing their righteousness to please others was in relation to charitable giving.

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”

Matthew 6:2

Jesus was in essence telling the Pharisees that giving for public recognition was not giving at all – it was in fact buying the praise of men. For that reason, there would be no reward from God because the reward of public praise had already been received.

The Pharisees were also well known for making a big show during prayer time. Again, they tried to impress people in the synagogue or on the street corner with their ostentatious demonstration of prayer.

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”

Matthew 6:5

And again, Jesus pointed out that those who pray in this way will not be recognized by God since they have already received their reward of adulation from man.

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.”

Matthew 6:7

Finally, Jesus taught that endless repetition was completely unnecessary. Jesus said that there was no need to pray in this manner because God is already well aware of your every need.

“Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Matthew 6:8

These examples of pretending to serve God while actually seeking the approval of those watching, applies to any and all transactions between us and our Lord. When we pray, when we give, when we serve others out of love, we should be willing to do all behind closed doors in the sight of no one else but God. True righteousness does not seek attention. True righteousness seeks the will of God and His blessing without recognition from others.

The Lord's Prayer

In the first major teaching event delivered by Jesus Christ known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus set aside some time to teach those listening how to pray. In so doing, He provided his followers with a model prayer commonly referred to today as The Lord's Prayer.

"This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Matthew 6:9-13

It is believed that Jesus did not intend for this prayer to be repeated word-for-word since just previous to offering this prayer, He stated that repetition was meaningless.

"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition."

Matthew 6:7 (NASB)

Instead, it is believed that the elements of the Lord's Prayer were examples of the direction an individual prayer should take. Jesus demonstrated that prayer should start with worship and a reverence for the Father. He follows this with an expectation of the Father's will being carried out by the establishment of His kingdom. The personal aspect of this prayer includes a request of God to help with basic needs of life and confession of misdeeds. In that same statement, there is also an expectation that prayer should include a personal promise to forgive those who have aggrieved us in some way. Finally, the Lord's Prayer concludes with a request for protection from the evil that occupies our world.

The Lord's Prayer is intended to demonstrate that prayer is a simple personal conversation with God and not a grand ostentatious spectacle designed to impress those listening. When we pray, we are to acknowledge God and worship Him, we are to demonstrate our trust and faith in Him, and we are to make our request known to Him as we confirm our dependency on Him. This is the simple model Jesus provided for us to follow.

Immediately after providing His followers with the Lord's Prayer, Jesus emphasized the importance of forgiving those who harm you.

*“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you,
your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
But if you do not forgive others their sins,
your Father will not forgive your sins.”*
Matthew 6:14-15

Our ultimate goal is to be like Jesus. We are to pray like Jesus. We are to worship the Father like Jesus. We are to trust God like Jesus. And we are to forgive like Jesus. Amen.

Your Treasure

In Christ's day, the Jewish philosophy was that those who are rich are those whom God loves. In *Deuteronomy 28*, in the Old Testament, God promised to bless the Jews materially if they were obedient to His Word; and He also told them there would be discipline and poverty if they disobeyed. Based on this instruction, the Jews thought that riches were a sign of God's blessing. During His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus took some time to set the record straight. Jesus started by making the point that material wealth is only temporary.

*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,
where moths and vermin destroy,
and where thieves break in and steal.”*

Matthew 6:19

The love we have for family and friends is far more valuable than any amount of material wealth. The reward we receive in personal satisfaction when we are able to help those in need is something that can't be purchased. Bank accounts have no value to God. Loving service to others is the currency of our Lord.

*“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy,
and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:20-21

Jesus wanted us to understand that material wealth has a way of clouding our perspective. When we spend time collecting material objects our vision is dimmed and it becomes hard to see what God truly desires for our life.

*“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.
But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness.”*

Matthew 6:22-23

If a bigger house, a new car, and a larger bank account is all we can see, we will be completely disconnected from God. In one of the most often repeated statements of Jesus, He makes clear that we have to make a choice between serving God and serving wealth.

*“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other,
or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.*

You cannot serve both God and money.”

Matthew 6:24

Our most precious treasure is that which has been generated by a heart focused on serving God by serving others. There isn't any amount of material gain that can compare with the gift of eternal life bestowed on us by God. When we leave this life behind and join Jesus in all eternity, we will also leave behind every one of our material possessions. What we will be taking with us into eternity is the reward for the blessings we have shared with others in this life.

Trust the Pilot

When we get on an airplane to fly across the country, we have to put our trust in the pilot and the airplane in which we are flying. We may not understand how spinning fans can lift a machine weighing several hundred thousand pounds off the ground. We likely have no clue what kind of training the pilot had or how many years he has been flying. We have not looked over the maintenance record of the aircraft. And we have not given the pilot a full medical exam. Typically we just buckle our seat belt and try to enjoy the ride. An airplane ride is not a significant part of our life – it is just a form of transportation.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made the point that obsessing over the daily necessities of life and the accumulation of wealth is a distraction from what is really important.

*“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink;
or about your body, what you will wear.*

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?”

Matthew 6:25

On the airplane ride, there isn't any amount of worrying that will cause the craft to fly better or give the pilot additional wisdom. Worrying in the passenger's seat of an airplane is useless.

“Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

Matthew 6:27

The airline company you are flying with, keeps a maintenance record that assures your airplane is mechanically fit and they also have a training routine that keeps your pilot fit. Even if these things have been neglected, there's nothing you can do about it. It is a much better use of your time to focus on the reason you are making the trip.

*“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,
and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

Matthew 6:33

Jesus taught that we are to trust God. The kingdom of heaven is our ultimate destination and we are to focus on that goal. When we worry about our personal wealth we substitute that for focusing on serving God by serving others. Jesus taught that we are to dedicate our lives to serving God and allow Him to fly the airplane.

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow,
for tomorrow will worry about itself.
Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

Matthew 6:34

The Plank in Your Eye

During the time of Christ, the religious leaders known as the Pharisees were well known for judging the actions of others. Jesus was not against judging between good and evil. Jesus was against assigning motives to someone else's actions.

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”

Matthew 7:1

Jesus used a somewhat humorous parable to demonstrate how people often assign false motives to others simply to distract from the glaring misdeeds in their own life.

*“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye
and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”*

Matthew 7:3

Most of us have seen this kind of judgment at some point in our lives. The guy at work who complains about someone taking home paper clips from the office supplies turns out to be embezzling thousands from the petty cash. Or the lady next door who complains about clutter in your driveway is a hoarder with a home stuffed full of useless trash. We all have something we are guilty of and for some reason there are some who want to use that very thing as a weapon of disgrace for others. In the end, when all is revealed, that kind of person will be judged much more harshly. Jesus taught that the solution is to avoid that kind of behavior.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged.

Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.”

Luke 6:37

Jesus taught that the real value in life is found when positive reactions to others are the focus of our interactions. Rather than judging others, we are far better off to offer understanding and actually provide assistance of some kind.

“Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you.

A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.

For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Luke 6:37-38

Finally, Jesus made one more important point when providing this important lesson. Jesus made it clear that those who participate in this kind of judgment will likely not be interested in hearing the truth about their behavior; therefore, it's useless to try to educate them.

“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs.”

Matthew 7:6

Jesus was directing his disdain directly at the Pharisees who consistently acted in a manor contrary to this teaching. The Pharisees were religious leaders who allowed their own self-interest to cloud the true desires of God. There is no religious leader or set of rules and regulations that can provide you with righteousness. Only the shed blood of Jesus Christ can cover all your sins and render you acceptable to God. Praise God for sending His Son!

Rock Foundation

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the first major sermon that Jesus delivered, He gave a few tips on what we need to do to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Much of what Jesus shared in the Sermon on the Mount was in contrast to what the religious leaders known as the Pharisees were teaching. The Pharisees had a long list of rules they believed needed to be followed to enter heaven and they did not accept Jesus as being the Son of God. Even today we have many religious leaders who espouse misguided regulations rather than depending solely on the work Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross.

As we listen to Jesus teach, we discover the path to heaven is far less cumbersome than the Pharisees or today's legalistic religious leaders would lead us to believe. Jesus began by encouraging those listening to engage in persistent prayer, expressing their needs to God.

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

Matthew 7:7

The pathway to heaven begins with regular communication with God. Jesus continued by explaining that all the laws found in the Bible can be summed up in the simple understanding that we need to love our neighbor. If we approach every human interaction with love, no one will ever be mistreated.

*“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you,
for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”*

Matthew 7:12

Next, Jesus pointed toward the one and only way into heaven – faith in Jesus Christ – not the long complicated path prescribed by the Pharisees or today's legalistic religious leaders.

*“Enter through the narrow gate.
For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction,
and many enter through it.
But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life,
and only a few find it.”*

Matthew 7:13-14

We find this simple explanation of what the Pharisees were missing given in the book of John:

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

John 6:29

In order to drive His point home, Jesus essentially described the Pharisees as false teachers who had nothing to show for their misguided rules and regulations.

*“By their fruit you will recognize them.
Do people pick grapes from thornbushes,
or figs from thistles?”
Matthew 7:16*

Jesus was at this time performing extraordinary miracles to demonstrate the authority of his words, but the Pharisees offered nothing but useless thorns.

In conclusion, Jesus tells us if we follow the wrong teachers our path to the Kingdom of Heaven will be washed away and destroyed because it is built on unstable ground. The only way to heaven is through Jesus Christ. When you stand firmly on that, understand your salvation is secure.

*“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine
and puts them into practice
is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”
Matthew 7:24*

The Harvest Field

Jesus began His ministry with the Sermon on the Mount in which He painted a graphic picture of the kingdom of heaven. He demonstrated His authority by His miracles – healing the sick, driving out demons, and raising the dead. As word got out, the crowds grew and there were more people eager to hear His teaching than He could possibly attend to. For this reason Jesus anointed his twelve disciples to begin teaching on His behalf.

“Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”
Matthew 9:37-38

The disciples were to proclaim the coming kingdom of heaven. This mission is the same mission assigned to all believers today. Jesus Christ came to earth to gather His sheep and shepherd them into His kingdom.

“As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’”
Matthew 10:7

During the ministry of Jesus, the disciples were given the same miraculous powers of healing that He had. This was to be their calling card and a powerful demonstration of their authority to teach on His behalf.

“Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.”
Matthew 10:1

Unfortunately, we no longer have these miraculous signs with which to identify true teachers of the gospel. What we have been left with, is the miraculous Word of God. We have the complete Biblical text that includes the New Testament’s word-for-word teaching of Jesus. We have the documented evidence of His miracles and the miracles performed by His disciples. Today, we identify true teachers of the gospel by their adherence to a strict interpretation of the Bible.

Jesus also instructed his disciples to travel light. They were to essentially take nothing with them on their journey. They were to remain in total dependence on the Lord.

“Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.”
Matthew 10:9-10

This is another indicator of a true follower of Jesus Christ that we can look for today. It is quite obvious that some people who proclaim to be teachers of the Word seem to be more dependent

on personal wealth than they are on God. Of course, we can't see inside anyone's heart, but those living a lavish lifestyle may not be the kind of advocate Jesus would employ.

Finally, Jesus made it clear that His message was only to be delivered to those willing to listen. The disciples were not instructed to force the good news on anyone. Today we sometimes see street preachers shouting through a bullhorn to an uninterested crowd. Based on the instructions of Jesus to His disciples, this would not likely be a method that would receive His approval.

*“If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words,
leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.”*

Matthew 10:14

The harvest is plentiful and the workers are few today. Is God calling you out into the field to seek and save the lost? Jesus teaches to leave your money behind and depend completely on Him. He also teaches that you are to take His message only to those who are willing to listen. Your authority is the Word of God. If you keep these three things in mind, there is no doubt you will reap a bountiful harvest.

Sharing the Good News

When Jesus sent his apostles out to begin their own personal ministry, he empowered them with the ability to heal the sick and drive out demons. He also spent some time offering them clear instructions on what to expect along the way. Some of these instructions are important lessons that apply to our own relationship with Jesus and to our efforts to share the gospel.

If you are a Christian, much of the world is hostile to your point of view. The devil is in control of this world (2 *Corinthians 4:4*) and he is doing everything in his power to challenge those who follow Jesus Christ.

*“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.
Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”
Matthew 10:16*

As followers of Jesus, we have to be on our guard. Fortunately, we have the Holy Spirit with us to guide the way. As long as we maintain our connection to Jesus, we will be protected and acknowledged before God.

*“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.
But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.”
Matthew 10:32-33*

As harsh as it may seem, our family ties can be infiltrated by the devil. Jesus makes it clear that our family relationships are not as important as our relationship with Him. Our love for Jesus is equal to our love for God and this should be the foundation of our affections.

*“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;
anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”
Matthew 10:37 (NIV)*

Finally, when we venture out to share the gospel with anyone we are traveling with Jesus. And if we are traveling with Jesus, we are doing God’s work.

*“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone
who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”
Matthew 10:40*

Our relationship with Jesus Christ is paramount. There is nothing more important. Our eternal existence depends on our connection to Jesus. This is why we should be diligent about sharing that connection with others. Those closest to us should be first on our list. This is not about

banging anyone over the head with the Bible. This is about letting your light shine in such a way that those around you will want to know the source of your joy. When that question comes, it is the duty of every Christian to be ready with an answer (*1 Peter 3:15*). Praise God for empowering all believers with the Holy Spirit. Praise Jesus for walking with us every step of the way. Like the apostles, we also are called to serve God by serving others.

My Yoke is Light

President Bill Clinton's birth name was William Jefferson Blythe after his father who died in a car crash. Later in life, Clinton's mom remarried and William Jefferson Blythe took on the last name of his step-father Roger Clinton, thus becoming the Bill Clinton we remember as the 42nd president of the United States. It can be said that if you know William Jefferson Blythe, you know President Bill Clinton. And if you know President Bill Clinton, you know William Jefferson Blythe.

Jesus made several claims to his deity and in one instance in the book of Matthew he makes it clear that He and God the Father are one and the same.

*“All things have been committed to me by my Father.
No one knows the Son except the Father,
and no one knows the Father except the Son
and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”
Matthew 11:27*

The only way to know God is through Jesus Christ. If you reject Jesus, you are rejecting God. The only way to know God is to trust Jesus. Unlike Bill Clinton and William Jefferson Blythe, Jesus Christ and God the Father are two distinct individuals; however, they are also one-and-the-same. We come to know God when we take refuge in the comforting arms of Jesus.

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
Matthew 11:28*

When Jesus preached this message he was making a direct contrast to the burdensome rules and regulations administered by the religious leaders known as the Pharisees. Jesus went on to talk about His yoke being light. A yoke is a wooden crosspiece fitted over the necks of two animals from which ropes are fastened to allow for efficient pulling of a plow or cart. Taking on a yoke implies one is freely submissive and deliberately yielding to the one holding the guide ropes.

*“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
Matthew 11:29-30*

Jesus wants us to know there is no long list of rules and regulations to follow. When you take on the yoke of Jesus you are making a commitment to follow His teaching. Jesus was able to boil his teaching down to one rule.

“For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command:

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Galatians 5:14

That makes for a very light burden.

Resurrection

A major turning point in the ministry of Jesus was the day the religious leaders known as the Pharisees accused him of being a tool of the devil. On this day, Jesus healed a man who was possessed by a demon. The man was blind and mute, and Jesus extricated the demon so that he could both talk and see. Those who witnessed this miracle were astonished. They turned to the Pharisees for an explanation. The Pharisees were powerful religious leaders and many would not accept Christ without their approval. Unwilling to give up their power and control over the people, the Pharisees attributed the works of Jesus to the power of the devil.

This was clearly an illogical and misguided position to take and Jesus illustrated this with three undeniable facts. First of all, Satan would not be interested in driving out his own demons.

*“If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself.
How then can his kingdom stand?”
Matthew 12:26*

Second, the Pharisees had already acknowledged other exorcists of that time to be a manifestation of God’s power; hence, they should admit that Jesus was sent by God.

*“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons,
then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”
Matthew 12:28*

And finally, Jesus clearly demonstrated power over the devil by removing the demon. Jesus could not be under the devil’s control if his actions were used to overpower the devil.

*“Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions
unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.”
Matthew 12:29*

Regardless of this irrefutable evidence, the Pharisees did not change their point of view. It was at this point that Jesus warned them that rejection of the power of the Holy Spirit that He was demonstrating, sealed their final judgment. They were given the Word of God, followed by the manifestation of God in the form of Jesus Christ, and now this final sign – the miracles of the Holy Spirit. There would be no further sign. Rejection of this final sign was unforgiveable.

*“Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven,
but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven,
either in this age or in the age to come.”
Matthew 12:32*

Jesus wanted those watching this debate between the Pharisees and the Son of God to fully understand the nature of the two sides. Jesus was delivering miracle after miracle. The Pharisees were doing nothing more than making a long list of rules and regulations.

*“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him,
and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.”*

Matthew 12:35

Our response to Jesus Christ determines our eternal destiny. At this point in the ministry of Jesus, the Pharisees stood their ground in the face of clear evidence to the contrary. They had rejected Christ and in essence sent him to the cross. This was not the demise of Jesus. This was the demise of the Pharisees. Jesus would soon rise from the dead and take His place at the right hand of God.

Bible Study

Jesus often taught using parables. This simply means he would use examples to paint a picture of the topic at hand. When the disciples asked Jesus why he taught using parables, He told them it was because He only wanted His true followers to fully comprehend some aspects of His teaching.

“He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.”

Matthew 13:11

Jesus used parables so that the complexity of His message could only be understood by true believers. To help the disciples understand more completely, Jesus told them what is known as the Parable of the Sower (*Matthew 13:3-9*) and then offered a clear interpretation. This parable told the story of a farmer who planted seeds that each fell in different types of soil and yielded different results. When Jesus later interpreted this parable (*Matthew 13:18-23*), he explained that the seed in the parable represented the Word of God and the different soils represented the different circumstances in which people are exposed to the Word of God. Some hearers will not understand, some will soon forget, some will allow their life to overpower their understanding, and finally the person who listens carefully and understands the Word will greatly prosper.

There used to be a popular test distributed in high school classrooms that was intended to gauge how carefully students were studying the material placed in front of them. The instructions at the top of the test told the students to read all questions before beginning. Those diligent students who read all the questions before writing any answers would discover that the last question instructed them to only write their name on the test and turn it in without answering any of the other often ridiculous questions. Those students who were not careful readers would spend the entire class trying to answer a list of questions that were totally useless.

Jesus is not interested in followers who take short cuts or are so distracted with other endeavors of life they are not fully devoted to His teaching. Jesus wants the good students who carefully follow the instructions. Jesus wants your full attention and for that reason He teaches in such a way as to leave those less attentive unprepared. We have been greatly blessed with access to the Word of God in many forms. It is our responsibility to take advantage of this knowledge. God is not going to spoon-feed this information to us. He wants us to demonstrate our sincerity by actively pursuing a comprehensive study of His Word.

Germination

The Word of God is the seed that grows the kingdom of God (*Luke 8:11*). Evangelists, preachers, and mature Christians use this seed that God has provided to grow new believers that will make up the kingdom of God. In the book of Mark, Jesus uses a simple parable to illustrate this important point.

*“He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like.
A man scatters seed on the ground.”*

Mark 4:26

The process of growing the kingdom of God begins with a man sowing seed. What our Lord wants us to fully grasp in this parable is the miraculous nature of the seed. The Word of God, when properly planted, has an astonishing ability to sprout and grow committed followers of Jesus Christ.

*“Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up,
the seed sprouts and grows,
though he does not know how.”*

Mark 4:27

Precisely how a tiny seed grows into a large plant, flowering bush, or towering tree is beyond our full understanding. What we do know is that the ability of the seed to produce its final product has nothing to do with us – it has everything to do with the seed.

*“All by itself the soil produces grain—
first the stalk, then the head,
then the full kernel in the head.”*

Mark 4:28

When we bring the Word of God to someone who is open to hearing the message, that person is a fertile field in which the seed will grow. The Word of God is the mechanism that brings about the transformation. We who sow the seed are merely gardeners spreading God’s miraculous truth. The harvest produced is the result of the seed, not the efforts of the sower.

“As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

Mark 4:29

The moment a new believer blossoms into a sincere follower of Jesus Christ, God is quick to gather that ripe fruit into His kingdom. This is an ongoing process that has been in daily operation since Jesus first began His ministry.

The parables of Jesus are wonderful illustrations of how God's creation is full of lessons that reveal His methods, His truth, and His connection to all of us. We don't have to go far to discover how God works. Step into your garden and plant a seed. That is how the kingdom of God is being built.

Weeds

Even the best garden needs to have the weeds pulled to remain healthy. Even the best grass seed may contain a few weeds. Jesus taught that the Word of God is a seed that will grow the kingdom of God (*Luke 8:11*). He went on to teach in another parable that an enemy would also be planting seed at the same time. This seed planting would be an effort to intermingle the good crop with a useless crop. This is Jesus teaching us that our world is intermingled with good and evil. The devil is trying his best to disrupt the kingdom of God by planting weeds that infiltrate the church.

*“Jesus told them another parable:
“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.
But while everyone was sleeping,
his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat,
and went away.”
Matthew 13:24-25*

In this parable, the landowner’s workers ask if they should pull the weeds but he directs them to leave the weeds in place. The problem is that these weeds are so insidious they are impossible to remove without disrupting the good crop. The solution is to allow the weeds to grow and then remove them at the time of harvest.

*“‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds,
you may uproot the wheat with them.
Let both grow together until the harvest.
At that time I will tell the harvesters:
First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned;
then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”
Matthew 13:29-30*

This parable gives us an insight into the cat and mouse game being played by God and the devil. God can destroy the devil at any time, but for reasons we may never fully understand He is allowing him to play his game. In the end the devil’s disruption will be destroyed and the Lord’s harvest will be undamaged.

Jesus wants us to know He is allowing evil to flourish to some extent in our world; He also wants us to know that he is in full control of these weeds and will eradicate them in the end. While there is no precise explanation as to why God has designed things to work in this way, it seems safe to assume there ultimately is some benefit for those of us who endure this cross-contamination. Our eternal existence must somehow be enhanced by the experience of sorting through good and evil on a daily basis. Repetition is one of the best teaching tools. Navigating

around evil as a matter of routine is the kind of repetition that will likely help us develop a clear understanding of the dark side. Apparently, the ability to easily identify evil will be useful to us in the world beyond.

One Man

Christianity was started by one man – Jesus – who was sent by God to the earth to save humans from death caused by unrighteousness. Because humans do not in themselves possess a righteous nature, they are unable to live eternally with God. Because God loves all of His Creation, He sent His Son to die on the cross as payment for all human sins. When we place our trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we acquire that Salvation. When we admit we cannot achieve righteousness on our own and concede that we must completely depend on God’s grace, we are granted eternal life with Him. This is the message of Christianity. In the early days of His ministry, Jesus painted a graphic picture for his followers to help them understand what was developing before their eyes.

*“He told them another parable:
“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed,
which a man took and planted in his field.”
Matthew 13:31*

A mustard seed is a tiny seed that grows into a large plant. Jesus planted this seed from which Christianity has grown. Starting with twelve apostles, Christianity has grown to a current population of over 2 billion. We have no accurate way to determine how many total Christians there have been since the ministry of Jesus began, but I think it’s safe to say it is at least a few billion more than the current population. That is enormous growth! Thousands of years later Christianity is still growing. Like the mustard seed, Christianity has flourished into a home for many.

*“Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows,
it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree,
so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”
Matthew 13:32*

This kind of extraordinary prediction could have only been made and fulfilled under miraculous circumstances. In fact, Jesus wasn’t making a prediction at all – He was making a statement of fact. When Jesus spoke this parable, He was already aware of exactly where we would be on this day. If Jesus were standing with us now He would not be the least bit surprised by these numbers. Who we are and where we are going has long been established. Jesus is in complete control and our eternal existence is guaranteed as long as we follow Him.

Bread Making

The basic ingredients for bread are flour, water, and yeast. Once these elements are mixed together, the yeast is activated and begins releasing air bubbles that expand the dough. As a result, the bread dough will expand to more than twice its original size. Yeast makes dough rise. Jesus used this process as a parable for the growth of the kingdom of heaven.

*“He told them still another parable:
“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast
that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour
until it worked all through the dough.”
Matthew 13:33*

Once the yeast is mixed into the dough and begins working, nothing can prevent the dough’s growth. The process is steady, continuous, and irreversible. Jesus wants us to understand that Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit working from the inside out, just as the yeast works in the dough. Like the yeast, the Holy Spirit is an invisible force that generates a profound change that radiates outward to impact our whole life.

Jesus used these graphic illustrations to help bring to life the supernatural elements of His plan for our lives. Just like the prophets that came before Him (*Psalm 78:2*), Jesus used parables to reveal secrets and mysteries in a way that only His followers would easily comprehend.

*“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables;
he did not say anything to them without using a parable.
So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:
“I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”
Matthew 13:34-35*

When asked by His disciples why He taught in parables, Jesus essentially said that he was speaking in a sort of code that His followers would understand (*Matthew 13:16*). Jesus did not want to offer these important truths to those who had hardened their heart against him (*Matthew 13:15*). For this reason, we can surmise that the parables are some of the most important lessons delivered by Jesus.

Parables are like a locker room talk by the head coach intended only for team members. A lot of inside information is provided that would be difficult, if not impossible, for outsiders to understand. Jesus used parables to help us understand that God’s work is visible all around us in everything we do. Jesus did not teach some theoretical doctrine. He turned on a light to reveal the inner workings of God’s Creation. Those who take the time to listen to His instruction will

develop the ability to see God's meticulous details constantly churning away like the inner workings of a fine Swiss watch. Like yeast in bread, this process is steady, continuous, and irreversible.

A Fine Treasure

God had a special relationship with the nation of Israel. These were His chosen people. The entire Old Testament of the Bible details the back and forth negotiation between God and His chosen people. One minute they would be on their knees worshipping Him and the next they would be in rebellion. We learn from this that our human nature is constantly pulling us away from God. Nevertheless, God promised the Israelites that great things would come to them if they could resist their human nature and stay true to Him.

*“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant,
then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.
Although the whole earth is mine,
you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”*
Exodus 19:5-6

The Israelites were unable to live up to God’s high standard and eventually were punished for their disobedience and scattered throughout the world. Of course, God has not forgotten them or the promises He made. Jesus illustrates this point in one of His parables.

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.
When a man found it, he hid it again,
and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”*
Matthew 13:44

From the very beginning God knew the Israelites could not live up to his standard of righteousness. From the very beginning God knew that he would eventually send His Son to die on the cross as payment for their sins. But God did not limit His Salvation to the Israelites.

*“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins,
and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”*
1 John 2:2

Jesus taught through a second parable that in the same way the Israelites were bought with the blood of Christ, the Gentiles, illustrated as a fine pearl, have also been purchased.

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.
When he found one of great value,
he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”*
Matthew 13:45-46

The ultimate price has been paid for our Salvation. God sacrificed His Son so that we might be free from our sin and thereby obtain the righteousness of God. God has provided us with a way to conquer our human nature and achieve eternal life with Him in the kingdom of heaven.

Panning for Gold

Gold panning is the process of standing in a river, scooping up some mud in a pan along with some water, and then sloshing it around until the useless material is discarded and only the gold is remaining. Because gold is a more substantial material, it remains in the pan and does not get washed away. Our Christian faith in much the same way provides us with the extra weight we need to be considered valuable to God. Without the righteousness provided by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we would be useless to God and therefore discarded when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom. Jesus used a parable about fishing to illustrate this point.

*“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net
that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.”
Matthew 13:47*

This parable is talking specifically about the return of Jesus to the earth where He will find believers and unbelievers all over the world. Jesus will be bringing an army of angels with Him and together they will separate the good from the bad – the righteous from the unrighteous.

*“When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore.
Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets,
but threw the bad away.”
Matthew 13:48*

Like the miner panning for gold, Jesus has no use for those who have turned away and will be seeking out His followers as the precious gold that will remain with Him throughout eternity.

*“This is how it will be at the end of the age.
The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous
and throw them into the blazing furnace,
where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
Matthew 13:49-50*

There's no way to know precisely what the imagery of a blazing furnace and gnashing of teeth accurately depicts. It certainly doesn't sound inviting. It may allude to the burning anguish one feels when they know a wrong decision has been made that cannot be corrected. Frankly, I'd prefer never to know what the other side is like. I'm confident my faith in Jesus will keep me from ever experiencing that kind of eternal trauma.

Like the gold miner, God is standing in the river of our lives sloshing around the mud and gravel waiting for the gold to sink to the bottom and be collected when Jesus returns. Unlike the gold

nuggets, we have a role to play in God's mining operation. We have a choice to make. When we make a decision to follow Jesus, and put our faith in Him, we become more valuable than gold nuggets and become children of God – loved and protected for all eternity.

Humility

At one point in the ministry of Jesus, the twelve apostles began to argue about which among them would be preeminent in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus at once recognized a perfect teaching moment and began to school the apostles in the basics of humility.

*“He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said:
“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Matthew 18:2-3

Like a child, utter dependence on our Father is needed to enter the kingdom of heaven. This childlike reliance on God is step one. The second step is related. A child does not exert his own will over his father. An obedient child complies completely with his father’s will. Those who will be great in the kingdom of heaven are those who have totally given themselves over to the Lord.

*“Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child
is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*

Matthew 18:4

This process of developing a childlike dependence on God establishes a connection to God that is unequalled. Jesus tells the apostles that such a childlike dependence makes one an equal with Him.

“And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”

Matthew 18:5

Jesus was the ultimate example of this totally subservient relationship with God. Obeying the will of His Father, Jesus went to the cross on our behalf as payment for our sins. Jesus obediently served His Father while humbly serving all of us by paying the price for our transgressions. The book of Mark records the final summation of this teaching:

*“Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said,
“Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”*

Mark 9:35

Of course, we will never attain the awesome servant spirit of Jesus, but our mission is to spend every moment of every day making a sincere attempt. Our life does not belong to us – it belongs to God. His will above our own should be our focus. How we approach every decision we make reflects our connection to this commitment to serve God by serving others. How we respond to the needs of others is a clear indication of our total dependency on God. If we truly trust God like a child, we will follow the path He places before us without hesitation.

What Matters

The fundamental teaching that binds all Christians together is the basic foundational truth that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. It doesn't matter where you go to church or even if you go to church. It doesn't matter what Christian denomination you claim as your own. It doesn't matter how much of the Bible you've read. What matters is that you have put your faith and trust in Jesus. What matters is that you are making a sincere effort to follow the teachings of Jesus.

During the ministry of Jesus, the apostles took on a bit of an attitude of superiority claiming that other followers of Jesus were not authorized to take action in His name. The apostles felt like they were the true believers and all the others were members of the wrong church. Jesus made it clear they were moving off in the wrong direction.

“Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”

“Do not stop him,” Jesus said.

“For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.”

Mark 9:38-40

Following Jesus is not a private club. Anyone with a pure heart can join. Jesus let the apostles know that telling someone to stop acting in His name is the same as turning someone away from God. Challenging the beliefs of other believers is a serious misstep in the eyes of Jesus.

“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea.”

Mark 9:42

Salt has a way of making certain foods more attractive. Jesus told the apostles that they were to attract people to Christ like salt, not admonish them or hinder their faith by claiming superior knowledge or special privileges.

“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

Mark 9:50

Believers are to be a peace with each other. This is what will attract unbelievers to Christ. As followers of Jesus, we are on a mission to share His love, not repeal the lost by demonstrating an

air of superiority. What matters is that you have put your faith and trust in Jesus. We should be all about encouraging others to do the same.

Forgiven

Jesus walked the earth to provide us with an example of perfection. Unlike all the rest of us, Jesus was a man without sin. Unfortunately, our human nature does not provide us with the ability to live a sinless life; therefore, Jesus, the perfect man, took our place on the cross and died so that we might be forgiven by God for our sins. By placing our faith in Jesus, we turn from our sin and seek to follow the teachings of Jesus for the rest of our life. That is salvation – we are forgiven for our sins past, present, and future. We will never be perfect. We will always need to be forgiven. Jesus wants His believers to forgive each other in that same manner.

*“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked,
“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?
Up to seven times?”
Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”
Matthew 18:21-22*

In His answer to Peter, Jesus is essentially telling him there is no limit to forgiveness. God’s forgiveness to us is immeasurable. The righteousness of God requires the perfection that we lack the ability to attain. God nevertheless continues to forgive us without limit to the amount of times we stumble. In like manner, we are to forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ in the same way.

Jesus further teaches in the parable of the wicked servant (*Matthew 18:21-35*) that those who don’t forgive are not His true followers and will be treated harshly for their lack of forgiveness.

*“In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured,
until he should pay back all he owed.
This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you
unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”
Matthew 18:34-35*

How can those who have experienced unlimited mercy from God not extend that same love and forgiveness to their brothers and sisters in Christ? The answer is simple. If you are a true believer, you will possess that same endless capacity for mercy. Only those who are not true believers will turn their back on those seeking forgiveness.

Our sinful human nature guarantees there will be conflicts and misunderstandings with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Praise God for empowering us with a new nature that seeks understanding above retribution. As followers of Jesus, our mission is to support and uplift our fellow believers. Every misstep is an opportunity to demonstrate God’s love and mercy by offering unconditional forgiveness.

Deception

In the world we live in, there are some who have decided to use the Bible as a tool for earning an income. As a result, the message they preach often proceeds beyond the scripture to include some self-aggrandizement. These false teachers attempt to elevate themselves to the level of prophet, claiming their teaching to be the source of new revelations. Their goal is to get people to buy their books and donate to their false ministry. Many of these charlatans are extremely successful. Fortunately, Jesus provided us with a way to tell the difference between honest men of God and false teachers. Jesus Himself was challenged on this very question during His ministry.

*“The Jews there were amazed and asked,
“How did this man get such learning without having been taught?”
Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own.
It comes from the one who sent me.”
John 7:15-16*

Jesus wasn't writing books or developing His own theology. Jesus was delivering information directly from God. The reason the Jews were so impressed by the teaching of Jesus, was because it was full of sound morals that pointed directly to God. They knew in their heart His words were true and could not understand how He acquired such wisdom without attending the schools of the rabbis. Unlike today's false teachers, Jesus was not out to make a name for himself. His mission was to glorify God.

*“Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory,
but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth;
there is nothing false about him.”
John 7:18*

Here is the method we can use to discern false preachers from true men of God. Those who are out for “*personal glory*” should be avoided. Those who are focused on bringing glory to God are likely speaking truth. Some of these false teachers are extremely clever and the line between personal promotion and true glory to God can be blurred by well-executed deception. In the end, when Jesus returns, the charade will be over and all of the false teachers will suffer greatly for their selfish gain gathered by exploiting God's Word. Until that time, our greatest source of truth is in fact, the Word of God. There is no deception in the pages of the Bible.

The Enemy

Jesus made a clear distinction between His teaching and those who rejected His teaching. It is important for everyone to understand that there are only two sides. Either you are a follower of Jesus who was sent by God to save humans from their sinful nature, or you are caught up in the devil's net. During the ministry of Jesus, the Jewish leaders known as the Pharisees rejected the obvious truth that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. The Pharisees claimed God to be their father but Jesus let them know that could not be the case.

*Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me,
for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me."
John 8:42*

Make no mistake about it, we are in the midst of a great battle between good and evil. Jesus has come to save us. The devil is out to destroy us. God your Creator is real. The devil is also real and is the master manipulator. The devil was able to so twist the vision of the Pharisees they were unable to see God standing in their presence. The Pharisees had been captured by the devil and were now his possession. Jesus let them know the truth.

*"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires.
He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth,
for there is no truth in him.
When he lies, he speaks his native language,
for he is a liar and the father of lies."
John 8:44*

Only a man sent by God could live a life completely without sin. Jesus was such a man. The fact that the Pharisees were unable to see this obvious fact is because they lost their relationship to God when they became the victim to the devil's deception.

*"Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?
If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?
Whoever belongs to God hears what God says.
The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."
John 8:46-47*

If you have trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior and dedicated your life to following His teaching, you are a child of God. Those who have rejected the teachings of Jesus have been trapped in the devil's snare. The only way to escape the devil is to trust Jesus. Those who sincerely call on Jesus will be welcomed with loving arms. While the battle between good and evil rages on in our world, Jesus has already claimed victory in the heavenly realms. The enemy

will one day be completely destroyed. Until that day, stay close to Jesus, and you too will find victory.

Greed

During the ministry of Jesus the religious leaders known as the Pharisees had a saying about material wealth, “Whom the Lord loves He makes rich.” They believed wealth was an indication of God’s approval. There are some preachers today who seem to have that same notion. Jesus did not agree with this point of view. Jesus saw this thinking as evidence of greed.

“Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

Luke 12:15

Jesus shared the parable of the rich fool (*Luke 12:16-21*) to illustrate his teaching. This was the story of a man who had so much grain he didn’t know what to do with it. Rather than share his excess with the poor, he decided to build bigger barns and hoard his abundance for himself. Then without warning the man died, leaving his great wealth behind. Because the man put his trust in his personal wealth rather than God, he had nothing with which to provide blessing and comfort in the life beyond.

“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Luke 12:21

Jesus was teaching that material needs are far less important than spiritual needs. He also taught that trusting God removes anxiety because God is far more capable of supplying our needs than we could ever be. What we eat, what we wear, where we live, what kind of car we drive, are all trivial matters next to our need to store up treasure in heaven (*Luke 12:33*) by serving others.

“For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.”

Luke 12:23

Those who are wealthy with material gain tend to become slaves to their possessions. Jesus taught that we are far better off becoming slaves to God by serving others. He made the point that your treasure is a reflection of your heart (*Luke 12:34*). If your treasure is in heaven, as a result of serving God, that is where your heart will be as well. Those who do not know God run around chasing material wealth. Those who know God rest in the knowledge that He will always take care of them.

*“For the pagan world runs after all such things,
and your Father knows that you need them.*

But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”

Luke 12:30-31

Ready to Serve

A good secretary or personal assistant often ends up doing most of the work. Busy executives need someone that can be counted on to serve tirelessly and be ready for anything that is needed. That kind of devotion is usually greatly appreciated. A good boss will recognize that effort and provide an appropriate reward. Those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ should consider ourselves as His servants and be dedicated to making preparation for His return.

“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.”
Luke 12:37

When you return to the office and find someone working hard on your behalf, a natural response might be to take over the work and offer your secretary a break. Jesus is telling us in the above verse that He will respond to our work on His behalf in exactly that way.

Jesus has left us in charge of His affairs while he is away. Like a good secretary, we are to manage all aspects of His ministry in perfect detail until His return. Jesus commanded us to love one another (*John 13:34*) and to turn from our selfish ways and follow His teaching (*Luke 9:23*). When Jesus returns, He wants to find everything in order. We will be rewarded for our effort to safeguard what has been entrusted to us. We are to stand together against the schemes of the devil making sure the contents of the church stays safe.

“But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.”
Luke 12:39

Followers of Jesus Christ should be prepared and ever vigilant. We don't know when Jesus will return so we need to be ready every moment of every day. Like the trusted personal assistant, we can never stop working on behalf of our Lord and Savior.

“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”
Luke 12:40

The True Vine

In his final instruction to the twelve apostles, Jesus presented the heart of His teaching in a vivid illustration that every gardener will understand. Jesus calls Himself the vine and God the Father the gardener.

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit,
while every branch that does bear fruit
he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”
John 15:1-2*

The fruit Jesus is talking about is love. Those who have no love are useless and will be discarded. Those who have love will be in some way challenged and encouraged to produce even more fruit. God the Father is constantly pruning the branches so that they will be able to pour out His love to others. Jesus is the vine. Believers who are true disciples of Jesus are the branches nurtured by God.

*“I am the vine; you are the branches.
If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit;
apart from me you can do nothing.”
John 15:5*

Without Jesus, we are worthless. Jesus is the ultimate supplier of God’s love (*1 John 4:7-21*). By staying focused on the teachings of Jesus, we remain connected to the source of love that fuels our connection to God.

*“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”
John 15:12*

That one command sums up all the teachings of Jesus. If everything we do passes through the filter of love, it’s impossible for us to do wrong. That sounds easy, but it is enormously hard. We live in a fallen world ruled by the devil (*1 John 5:19*). Every day we are in a battle between good and evil. Every day we have to navigate our way through the devil’s schemes in order to stay true to Jesus. Thankfully, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to overcome but it takes a sincere effort on our part to hang on tightly to God’s love.

*“You are my friends if you do what I command.
I no longer call you servants,
because a servant does not know his master’s business.
Instead, I have called you friends,
for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”
John 15:14-15*

By following the commandment of Jesus to love one another and by faithfully following His teachings, we become His true friend. Jesus spent three years walking the earth sharing everything He learned from His Father with the twelve apostles who ultimately shared those lessons with us in the pages of the Bible. There is no better friend than Jesus. That friendship is available to anyone willing to listen to His instruction.

Summary of His Teaching

Working your way through this series of devotionals on the teachings of Jesus is a major step in growing and fine-tuning your relationship with him. It doesn't matter if you're a new Christian, a long time believer, or someone who is simply seeking to make a connection with Jesus. The truth and light found in the words of our Savior will have a positive impact on everyone. The lessons highlighted in this book are not a complete and exhaustive compendium of all the teachings of Jesus. If you've gone through these devotionals with your Bible by your side, looking up each verse to read in context, you likely discovered many more important truths. And if you've traveled this book from beginning to end, you may be overwhelmed with all that you've consumed. To help you get a handle on where you've been and help organize your thoughts, here is a brief summary of all the teachings of Jesus presented in this book.

- Stay in the Word in order to protect yourself from the schemes of the devil.
- By trusting Jesus, we are reborn spiritually as children of God.
- Those who are controlled by the devil will hide from the bright light of Jesus.
- Jesus proclaimed himself to be the Messiah and Savior of the world.
- Jesus made it completely clear that he and the father are one and the same.
- As a believer, what you say and how you act, should lead others to Jesus and glorify your heavenly Father.
- Jesus came to let us know that righteousness can only be attained through the absolute, unalterable holiness of God, and is delivered as a gift to those who put their faith in Him.
- We cannot in our own power achieve the perfection God requires for righteousness. The only way to be acceptable to God is by placing your faith in Jesus Christ.
- True righteousness does not seek attention. True righteousness seeks the will of God and His blessing without recognition from others.
- Our ultimate goal is to be like Jesus. We are to pray like Jesus. We are to worship the Father like Jesus. We are to trust God like Jesus. And we are to forgive like Jesus.
- Our most precious treasure is that which has been generated by a heart focused on serving God by serving others.
- Jesus taught that we are to trust God and not worry about our life.
- Jesus taught that the real value in life is found when positive reactions to others are the focus of our interactions.

- If we follow the wrong teachers, our path to the Kingdom of Heaven will be washed away and destroyed because it is built on unstable ground. Our firm foundation is Jesus Christ.
- God is calling us into the field to seek and save the lost.
- There is nothing more important than our relationship with Jesus and this is why we should want to share that connection with others.
- The central message in the teaching of Jesus is to love God and love our neighbor.
- Those responsible for the death of Jesus were actually assisting him to save the world.
- God wants us to demonstrate our sincerity by actively pursuing a comprehensive study of His Word.
- The Kingdom of God is being grown by the Word of God as the seed.
- God is training us to be able to identify evil.
- Jesus is in complete control and our eternal existence is guaranteed as long as we follow Him.
- Like yeast in bread, the process of Jesus growing the kingdom of God is steady, continuous, and irreversible.
- God sacrificed His Son so that we might be free from our sin and thereby obtain the righteousness of God.
- When we make a decision to follow Jesus, and put our faith in Him, we become more valuable than gold nuggets and become children of God – loved and protected for all eternity.
- If we truly trust God like a child, we will follow the path He places before us without hesitation.
- As followers of Jesus, we are on a mission to share His love; not repel the lost by demonstrating an air of superiority.
- As followers of Jesus, our mission is to support and uplift our fellow believers. Every misstep is an opportunity to demonstrate God's love and mercy by offering unconditional forgiveness.
- Our greatest source of truth is in fact, the Word of God. There is no deception in the pages of the Bible.
- Those who have rejected the teachings of Jesus have been trapped in the devil's snare.
- Those who are wealthy with material gain tend to become slaves to their possessions. Jesus taught that we are far better off becoming slaves to God.
- Followers of Jesus Christ should be prepared and ever vigilant. We don't know when Jesus will return so we need to be ready every moment of every day.
- By following the commandment of Jesus to love one another and by faithfully following His teachings, we become His true friend.

Take Jesus with You

I pray you've found these devotionals inspiring, uplifting, and informative. I know the scripture references will have a profound impact on your life if you sincerely seek a deeper understanding through prayer and continued study of the Word of God. As a follower of Jesus, you are his friend. Take him with you wherever you go. Fill your heart with the teachings of Jesus and share these lessons with love and compassion at every opportunity.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*

Proverbs 3:5-6