

FEATURING



THE
TONY EVANS
BIBLE
COMMENTARY



Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda



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THE TONY EVANS BIBLE COMMENTARY

The Tony Evans Bible Commentary includes an introduction to each Bible book followed by passage-by-passage exposition of the entire Bible by Dr. Tony Evans. In addition, there is a special front matter section with introductory resources. The insights in this commentary will help explain God's Word in a fresh way. Applying these truths will empower readers to have transformed lives that then transfer the values of the kingdom of God to others.

This Bible also includes video resources from Dr. Evans—such as introductions to the books of the Bible and Kingdom Agenda videos—which you can view by scanning a QR code or typing in the provided web address.





ABOUT

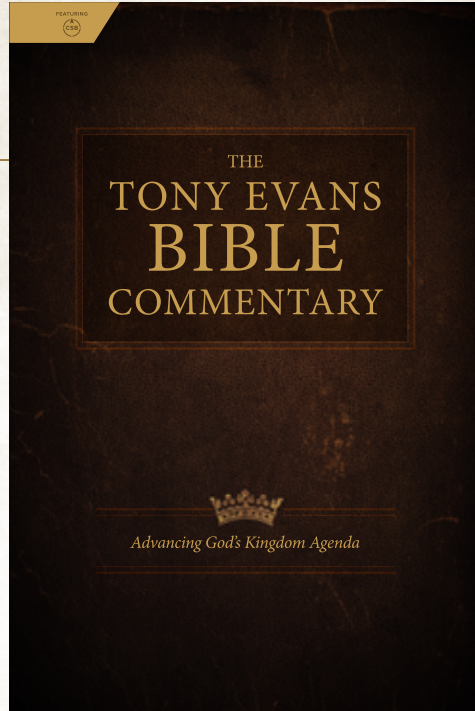
DR. TONY EVANS

Dr. Tony Evans is the founder and senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, is the founder and president of The Urban Alternative, served as chaplain of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks and the NFL's Dallas Cowboys, and is the author of over 100 books, booklets, and Bible studies. The first African American to earn a doctorate of theology from Dallas Theological Seminary, he has been named one of the 12 Most Effective Preachers in the English-Speaking World by Baylor University. Dr. Evans holds the honor of writing and publishing the first full-Bible commentary and study Bible by an African American. His radio broadcast, *The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans*, can be heard on more than 1,400 US outlets daily and in more than 130 countries.

Dr. Evans launched the Tony Evans Training Center in 2017, an online learning platform providing quality seminary-style courses for a fraction of the cost to any person in any place. The goal is to increase biblical literacy and to advance God's kingdom agenda. Dr. Tony Evans is married to Lois, his wife and ministry partner of over 50 years. They are the proud parents of four, grandparents of thirteen and great-grandparents of two.

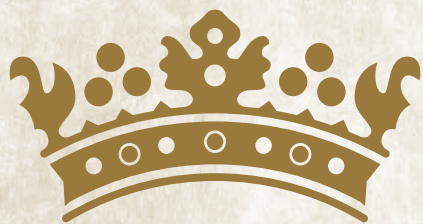
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INTRODUCTION

This commentary is based on a simple yet profound biblical worldview: the glory of God through the advancement of his kingdom. This is the unifying theme of Scripture, from Genesis through Revelation. The concept of God's kingdom is what ties all of the Bible together. When this central point of connectivity is lost to the reader, it is easy for Scripture to seem like a series of disconnected stories, events, personalities, and doctrines that do not strategically and thematically connect to one another.

The word *kingdom* means "rule" or "authority." When linked to God, it refers to the rule of God in both heaven and earth encompassing both eternity and time. It is therefore comprehensive in nature. This kingdom is composed of a ruler (God), subjects (angels and people), a realm (creation), and regulations (laws).

The Bible unfolds how God's kingdom operates in the affairs of the world and how God receives glory through his kingdom rule, even when that rule is being opposed by both angels and human beings. While God's kingdom rule takes various forms with varying laws through varying administrations (i.e., dispensations), it nonetheless maintains its central goal of bringing God glory whether through blessing or judgment.

The *kingdom agenda*, then, is the visible manifestation of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life. God's kingdom agenda is carried out through four covenantal spheres: the individual, the family, the church, and the government (i.e., nations). A covenant is a divinely created relational bond through which God administers his kingdom program. It establishes a legal relationship in the spiritual realm that is to be lived out in the physical realm. To operate and function underneath the umbrella of God's kingdom covenants and guidelines is to position the specific covenantal relationship (i.e., individual, family, church, government) to experience God's greatest involvement and benefits within

that covenantal sphere. Conversely, to operate outside of and in opposition to God's kingdom covenant is to experience the negative consequences of not being aligned and covenantally covered.

This commentary is designed to reflect this kingdom perspective through an exposition of each of the sixty-six books of the Holy Scriptures. My goal is that this work will serve as a valuable study resource for serious students of the Bible by combining exegesis, exposition, and exhortation that creates a relevant kingdom mindset.

As you use this study tool, remember:

- A. Study the Scriptures with a view to meeting with God, not just learning about him.
- B. Study the Scriptures by routinely asking, "What should I do in light of what I have learned?"
- C. Study the Scriptures in their context in order to be accurate in your understanding of what the biblical authors are saying.
- D. Study the Scriptures in prayer and in dependency on the Holy Spirit to open up your mind and heart to the meaning and contemporary relevancy and application of the text.
- E. Study the Scripture with a kingdom mindset, seeking to identify God's rule over every area of life.

While nothing can be added to or subtracted from God's inerrant Word, it is my sincere hope that this tool will aid you in your understanding and application of the Bible to your life. For additional study notes, articles, and supporting materials, see also *The Tony Evans Study Bible: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda*. Most importantly, it is my prayer that your reading, studying, and obedience to the written Word will lead you into a deeper, more intimate relationship with the living Word, Jesus Christ, as kingdom disciples as you live all of life under his kingdom rule.

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

The Bible is a book unlike any other book. It is, in fact, a whole library of books, all bound together in one volume. These individual books were written by many different authors over an extended period of time. What makes the Bible so unique, though, is that its many human authors were all inspired by its one divine author—God himself! The Greek word Paul uses for “inspired by God” means “God-breathed.” These words that carry God’s breath are words that can change and transform our lives. Paul reminds us that all of Scripture “is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

If we want to understand who God is, what his purposes are, and how he has made Himself known to the human race, we cannot afford to ignore the Bible. Whenever you purchase a complicated gadget it is usually accompanied by a set of instructions—a manufacturer’s handbook. Without this handbook you’ll find yourself having to guess at how it works. In a sense, the Bible is the “manufacturer’s handbook” for life. The one who created us has plans and purposes for us. If we don’t know the content of his manufacturer’s handbook, we won’t know his plans and purposes, nor will we know how to live as he intends.

Still, many people put little effort into reading the Bible. Sometimes the problem is just laziness or a wrong set of priorities. But that isn’t the only reason. The Bible *can* be a difficult book to understand. While its most important teachings are understandable by a child, there is much in the pages of Scripture that is not easy to grasp without some extra effort and help.

That’s where a study Bible comes in handy. It will provide you with some background material and theological explanation that will bring biblical truths into sharper focus. But don’t count on the study Bible to do all the work for you. If you want to get the most out of the Scripture you need to learn to read it for yourself and learn to interpret it by giving careful focus to the passage you are reading and by comparing what you learn there with the rest of what the Bible teaches.

What follows are some things you can do to help you get the most out of your biblical study.

READ CAREFULLY

Though the Bible is an exciting book, you can’t read it in the same way you’d read a thrilling novel. If you race through the pages you will miss much of what it has to offer. Good Bible reading begins with reading slowly and carefully, and it is a good idea to have a pen and paper handy to jot down the things you observe. Or maybe you’ll want to write in the margins of your Bible. Mark down the things that inspire, challenge, or puzzle you. If there is a key verse or key idea you discover, you might want to underline it. You can make a study Bible your own by recording *in* it the things you are learning *from* it.

As you read, pay close attention to words like *if*, *then*, and *therefore*, which will help you understand the relationships between the concepts it teaches. These little words may reveal requirements and expectations that you need to keep in mind. Many of the Bible’s promises, for example, are conditional. There are things you are expected to do if that promise is to become real in your life. And in the New Testament letters, the word *therefore* is often a signal that what went before is the doctrinal basis on which a truth can be embraced and applied.

Read and read again. You might even try reading aloud as a way of forcing yourself to slow down and take in every thought. Above all, don’t be in a hurry. Read slowly and think about what each sentence and paragraph means. Don’t just hunt for an inspiring nugget of truth. Let every sentence speak to you!

ASK QUESTIONS

One of the common characteristics of children is that they are almost insatiably curious. They ask lots of questions, which can

sometimes become exhausting for their parents. But it is the way they learn new things. One of the problems with adults is that they often stop asking questions as they grow older. So be more like a curious child as you read the Bible. Don't assume you already know what it says. Keep your curiosity high and keep your heart and mind open. One great way to do this is by cross-examining the passage you are reading in order to make sure you are noticing all it has to say. See if you can answer these questions: *who, what, where, when, why, and how?* Exploring the answers to these questions will open new depths of understanding.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE CONTEXT

Paying attention to *context* is extremely important if you want to accurately understand what the Bible is saying. Some people just search its pages for an individual verse that speaks to their need of the moment, without paying much attention to the verses that surround it. Reading this way is like treating the Bible as a fortune cookie or as a collection of inspirational memes. As you read the Bible, sometimes a verse will stand out and engage your heart in a very personal way. But when that happens, it's important to see how that verse relates to the verses around it. If you don't pay attention to the context, you are in danger of trying to make the Bible say something that it doesn't actually say.

Every verse of the Bible is part of a chapter, and every chapter is part of a book, and every book of the Bible is part of one larger God-inspired message that unfolds across its pages. Many people don't realize that the Bible wasn't originally written in chapters and verses. Each book was one continuous text contained in a scroll, and it was not until the late Middle Ages that someone came up with the idea of dividing it into chapters and verses to make it more convenient for readers and as a tool for helping people locate specific passages they wanted to remember. You should keep that in mind before pulling a verse out of its context and applying it to your life.

As you read, pay attention to the immediate context of the neighboring verses and try to understand the main point that the biblical writer is making. Ask yourself how it fits in the context of the entire book. You should notice if the passage you are reading is part of a larger story or a larger argument and who is speaking or being spoken to. There are, for example, places in the Bible that contain the words of Satan or of a godless leader, and we don't want to treat those in the same way we'd treat the words of Jesus!

As we study the Bible, it is important to keep our focus upon the main points and the most important teachings, and not allow ourselves to be sidetracked too much by secondary issues. Make sure you understand the big picture through your *telescope* before you pull out your *microscope* to examine the details! The Bible isn't a puzzle book or a coded message, so don't look for complicated symbols and secret meanings. Ask yourself what it meant to the original readers and how that applies to you today.

BE READY TO OBEY

Applying what we read in the Bible to our daily lives is the highest purpose of Bible study. We don't study it so that we can win theological arguments or impress people with our knowledge. We read it so that God can use it to transform our lives. Therefore, we should read the Bible with humility and an open heart, being ready to be challenged and changed by God's Word. We should read it with an open mind, not assuming we already know what it means. The more you read the Bible, the more new and fresh truths you will discover in its pages. It is inexhaustible.

The Bible speaks with God's own authority, so the proper response to such authority is obedience. James 1:23 tells us that the Bible is a mirror in which we can catch an honest glimpse of ourselves. As you read, you can perceive where you are falling short, where you are making improper compromises, where you are following your own desires instead of God's best, and where you are placing your cultural prejudices over God's truth. So, as you read Scripture, hear—and then obey.



MATTHEW

INTRODUCTION

Author

ALTHOUGH THE AUTHOR DIDN'T identify himself by name in the text, the title of this Gospel includes the name "Matthew" in the earliest existing manuscripts. In addition, several early church fathers (including Papias, Irenaeus, and Origen) attributed authorship to Matthew. Papias also said that Matthew originally wrote the Gospel in Hebrew (what we have today is in Greek).

Many critical scholars today deny that Matthew is the author. They claim that the Greek Matthew that we have does not look like it was translated from Hebrew. If Papias was wrong about that, they argue, he was probably wrong about who wrote it. But there are other scholars who think Matthew could be a Greek translation from Hebrew. Regardless, it wouldn't necessarily mean Papias was wrong about authorship. The early church unanimously claimed that the apostle Matthew penned the Gospel that bears his name.

There is also internal evidence to support this—that is, evidence within the Gospel itself. Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27 call the tax collector who became a disciple "Levi." In Matthew 9:9-13, this man is named "Matthew." Also, in 10:3, the apostle Matthew is identified as a tax collector, and it may be that he had two names like Simon / Peter.

Though we can't be absolutely certain, it is best to trust the testimony of the early church and affirm that Matthew wrote this Gospel.

Background

Most—though not all—scholars today think that Matthew used Mark's Gospel as one of his sources when composing his own Gospel. If this is true, Matthew must have been written after Mark. It is likely that Mark's Gospel was written sometime in the 50s (see Background discussion on Mark's Gospel). Matthew, then, could have been written any time beginning in the mid to late 50s. The church father Irenaeus, who wrote in the late second century, claimed that Matthew wrote his Gospel while Paul and Peter were preaching in Rome. This would have been in the early 60s.

Message and Purpose

Matthew was a tax collector, which means he was unpopular. He left everything to follow Jesus after he concluded that Jesus was the Messiah. Matthew was authorized to write the Gospel that bears his name, and its subject is very simple: it's about the King and his kingdom. Matthew was introducing, especially to Jews, the message that God has sent his King, his Messiah, who would rule as his regent on earth by offering the kingdom to his people. In this sense Matthew is the culmination of all the Old Testament's anticipation of the Messiah who would come.

The apostle's concern was giving convincing proof that Jesus was the messianic King whom the Jews were anticipating and whom the world needs so desperately. That's why

he began with Jesus's genealogy to establish his lineage through David. Matthew also presented Jesus's kingdom discourses, teaching, and miracles as proof of his messianic claim.

The book winds to a disquieting moment, the crucifixion. If Jesus is the Messiah, how could he be put to death? Thankfully, the scene is followed by the resurrection and the announcement that the King is alive and coming back, and that his kingdom is in this world today. Jesus's Great Commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel (28:18-20) means that the book of Matthew is relevant for us as believers today.



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Outline

- I.** Genealogy, Birth, and Childhood (1:1–2:23)
- II.** Baptism, Temptation, and the Start of Ministry (3:1–4:25)
- III.** The Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29)
- IV.** Healings and Miracles (8:1–9:38)
- V.** Sending Out the Twelve (10:1–42)
- VI.** Confusion and Opposition (11:1–12:50)
- VII.** Parables about the Kingdom (13:1–58)
- VIII.** Spreading Ministry and Growing Opposition (14:1–17:27)
- IX.** Greatness, Restoration, and Forgiveness (18:1–35)
- X.** Ministry on the Way to Jerusalem (19:1–20:34)
- XI.** Ministry in Jerusalem (21:1–23:39)
- XII.** The Olivet Discourse (24:1–25:46)
- XIII.** Suffering, Crucifixion, and Death (26:1–27:66)
- XIV.** Resurrection and Great Commission (28:1–20)



MATTHEW

I. GENEALOGY, BIRTH, AND CHILDHOOD (1:1–2:23)

1:1 The apostle Matthew opens his Gospel account with a **genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the Son of Abraham**. Many people tend to skip over this record and the one in Luke, but that's a mistake. These genealogies demonstrate that Jesus had a legitimate legal claim to be the Messiah—the Son of David and heir to the throne (see 2 Sam 7:12-16; Isa 11:1-10). Though Jewish genealogical records would be destroyed in AD 70 when Jerusalem fell to the Romans, Jesus's genealogy was supernaturally preserved in the Gospels.

1:2-17 Matthew's genealogy reaches back to **Abraham** (1:2) and proceeds through **King David** (1:6) to reach Jesus's assumed father, **Joseph** (1:16). There's a problem, though, with **Jeconiah** (1:11)—also known as Jehoiah-chin and Coniah (see 1 Chr 3:16; 2 Chr 36:8-9; and Jer 22:24). According to Jeremiah, Jeconiah would not have a biological descendent sitting on David's throne because of his own sins (Jer 22:30).

So, although Joseph had a legal right to the throne, because of Jeremiah's prophecy, it would never happen biologically. Thus, Matthew makes it clear that Joseph is not Jesus's *biological* father but his *adoptive* father, who was **the husband of Mary** (1:16). Interestingly, Luke provides Jesus's genealogy through her (Luke 3:23-38). This shows that Jesus is related to David biologically through David's son Nathan (Luke 3:31). Therefore, he's related to David on both sides of the family tree. And because his biological relationship is through Nathan

and not through Jeconiah, he can sit on the throne.

Notice that Jesus's genealogy is filled with imperfect people. **Jacob** (1:2) was a deceiver. **David** (1:6) committed adultery and murder. **Solomon** (1:7) took an abundance of wives and concubines. **Manasseh** (1:10) was one of Judah's most wicked kings. Moreover, and while women do not normally show up in genealogies, the women in Jesus's line were particularly questionable. **Tamar** (1:3) was a Canaanite who posed as a prostitute. **Rahab** was a prostitute; **Ruth** was from Moab, a non-Israelite people that worshiped false gods (1:5). Another observation about Jesus's genealogy is that it is mixed racially, including both Jews and Gentiles and indicating that Jesus's kingdom identity and rule includes all races of people.

All of this points to God's sovereign grace. He accomplishes his glorious purposes in spite of difficult circumstances and the character of the people involved. If he can use the people listed in 1:2-16 to bring the Christ into the world, God can surely use you too.

Notice also that of the five women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy, four are of Hamitic descent: Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba, and Ruth. That doesn't mean that Jesus was black. To assert such, as some black theologians and religious leaders do, is to fall into the exclusionist perspective of many whites, who would make Jesus an Anglo-European, blue-eyed blond with little relevance to people of color. It would also fail to respect the distinct Jewish heritage of Christ. Jesus was a person of mixed ancestry.

It blesses me to know that Jesus had black in his blood because this destroys any perception of black inferiority once and for all. In Christ we find perfect man and sinless Savior. This knowledge frees blacks from an inferiority complex, and at the same time it frees whites from the superiority myth. In Christ, we all have our heritage.

Black people, as all other people, can find a place of historical, cultural, and racial identity in him. As Savior of all mankind, he can relate to all people, in every situation. In him, any person from any background can find comfort, understanding, direction, and affinity—as long as Christ is revered as the Son of God, a designation that transcends every culture and race and one to which all nations of people must pay homage.

1:18-19 In biblical times, a marriage in the Orient included several stages. The betrothal or engagement period was not like our modern engagements. The engagement of **Joseph** and **Mary** was a legal contract, as binding as marriage. So when Joseph **discovered** that Mary was **pregnant**, he **decided to divorce her secretly**. He was a **righteous man** and thought she had committed adultery, but he didn't want to **disgrace her publicly** (1:19).

1:20 Before Joseph could carry out his plans, though, **an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream**. Angels are divine messengers, and one of the ways they carry out their role in Scripture is by faithfully delivering God's message to humans. This angel told Joseph to take Mary for his **wife** because the child **conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit**.

God has created laws (such as the law of gravity) that govern the universe. When he intervenes in the regular course of events, interrupts those laws, and demonstrates his power over creation, a *miracle* takes place. This would be the most unique birth in history because Mary had never been touched by a man. A virgin would miraculously give birth because of the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Even so, this miracle involved more, for hers wasn't just any baby. The greatest miracle in human history occurred when God became man. The eternal Son of God took on

human flesh, combining full deity and full humanity in one person. Jesus Christ is the God-man.

1:21-23 They were to call their son **Jesus**, a Greek name corresponding to the Hebrew name *Joshua*, which means "the Lord saves." Thus, according to the angel, the child's name was to indicate the reason he had come into the world—that is, **he will save his people from their sins** (1:21).

Matthew doesn't want his readers to think these are unexpected events; instead, they are a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (1:22). Mary was part of a plan that God had been orchestrating for centuries. Long before, Isaiah had prophesied, **The virgin will . . . give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel**. And Immanuel, Matthew tells us, means, **God is with us** (1:23). That is the essence of Christmas. The baby in the manger was God himself in the person of his Son. He was deity in a diaper. Heaven was coming down to earth; eternity was invading time. The King of the universe had come to be with us (see John 1:14) and save sinners (Matt 1:21).

All the problems in this world can be traced back to sin, and the Son of God came to save you from your sins because you couldn't save yourself. Jesus Christ entered the world to identify our sins, forgive us for our sins, give us victory over our sins, and give us an eternal home free from sin. That truth is what Christmas is all about. If you miss that, you've missed the point.

1:24-25 When Joseph awoke, he did as the **angel had commanded him** (1:24). Again, he was a righteous man (1:19). So, when he understood what God was doing, he complied in full obedience. He **did not have sexual relations with Mary until she gave birth**: Jesus was to be born of a virgin (1:25).

2:1-2 After **Jesus was born in Bethlehem . . . wise men** arrived. There are two common misconceptions to clear up about these visitors. First, according to legend, there were three wise men. However, we only know that they brought three specific gifts (2:11). We don't know how many men there were.

Second, contrary to how the scene is often portrayed, the wise men weren't present at the nativity. They weren't there for Jesus's birth. By the time they arrived, Joseph and Mary were living in a house (2:11). In addition, as we'll see, Herod sought to kill all the male children two years old and younger (2:16); therefore, Jesus was a toddler when the wise men saw him, not a baby.

Matthew tells us their origin was **from the east** (2:1)—perhaps Babylonia or Persia. They were looking for the **king of the Jews**, had seen **his star**, and had come to **worship him** (2:2). The Greek term for these men is *magi*. They were astrologers—students of the heavenly bodies. Whatever religious practices they'd engaged in previously, when they saw the manifestation of God's glory in the heavens, they responded and traveled to worship the true King.

2:3-8 They entered **Jerusalem** (the obvious place to find a king) and went to the palace of **King Herod**, also known as Herod the Great. Herod wasn't a Jew. He was an Idumean whom the Romans had made a ruler of the Jews. So when he heard what the wise men had to say, **he was deeply disturbed** (2:3). As far as he was concerned, there was no room for any king but him.

Herod asked **the chief priests and scribes** to tell him **where the Christ would be born** (2:4). And while these leaders clearly knew the Scriptures, they never pursued the Savior (see John 5:39-40). They didn't act on what they studied. Nevertheless, when Herod learned that Scripture foretold that the Messiah would be born **in Bethlehem** (2:5-6; see Mic 5:2), he **secretly summoned the wise men** (2:7). He told them he also desired to **worship** and asked them to **search carefully for the child and report back** (2:8). But Herod had ulterior motives. He wasn't about to let anyone take away his kingdom.

2:9-11 The wise men continued their search, following **the star** until it **stopped above the place where the child was** (2:9). Whereas Herod was deeply distressed over the news of a new king, the wise men **were overwhelmed with joy** to see him (2:10). They fell on **their knees** before the child

and gave him gifts of **gold, frankincense, and myrrh** (2:11).

True worship can't be contained. These men had traveled an incredible distance for perhaps as long as two years to worship this King, but they knew he was worth the journey. How much are you willing to be inconvenienced to worship the King of kings? How badly do you want him?

2:12-13 Since they had faithfully sought the Savior, the wise men received inside information. They were **warned in a dream** about **Herod** and **returned home by another route** (2:12). Joseph also—since he had obeyed the Lord's word (1:24-25)—received further information and understanding. **An angel** warned him to **flee to Egypt** with Mary and Jesus for safety from **Herod** (2:13). When you obey God's revelation you get further divine illumination for your destination.

2:14-15 Joseph **took the child and his mother and escaped to Egypt** where they'd be safe until Herod died (2:14). Matthew tells his readers that this was to fulfill **what was spoken by the Lord** through the prophet Hosea: **Out of Egypt I called my Son** (2:15).

In his prophecy, Hosea was talking about Israel, whom God called his son and delivered from Egypt (see Hos 11:1), but Matthew understood that Israel was a type of God's Son who was yet to come. A *type* is a historical person, institution, or event that pre-figures a future corresponding reality. Thus, as God called his son Israel out of Egypt, so he would call his true Son out of Egypt. Matthew knew that many Old Testament texts point forward to Jesus.

2:16-18 **When he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men**, Herod displayed his true, murderous colors. He ordered the massacre of **all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under**. He used the information **learned from the wise men**—which they had learned by divine illumination—to slaughter innocent children (2:16). Matthew recognized this as another fulfillment of prophecy—this time from **Jeremiah** (2:17). Here too there is a connection between Israel and their Messiah. As Israel wept in

Jeremiah's day for their children in exile (see Jer 31:15-16), so they wept again in Matthew's day for their children who were persecuted in connection to Jesus.

2:19-22 After Herod's death, God once again communicated to **Joseph** in a **dream** to **take the child and his mother** back to **Israel** (2:19-21). When Joseph heard that **Archelaus**, Herod's son, **was ruling over Judea** in his father's place, **he was afraid to go to there**. But God addressed his fears and sent him to **Galilee** (2:22).

2:23 There the family settled in the town of **Nazareth** and thus it was fulfilled that Jesus **would be called a Nazarene**. Actually, though, such a statement is not found in any of the Old Testament prophets. So likely Matthew was thinking of statements like Isaiah 53:3: "He was despised and rejected by men" (see also Ps 22:6; Isa 49:7), because Nazareth was viewed as a despised community from which no good thing could come (see John 1:46). God sovereignly wove his plan in history to bring the Messiah into the world.

II. BAPTISM, TEMPTATION, AND THE START OF MINISTRY (3:1-4:25)

3:1-3 All four Gospels testify to the ministry of **John the Baptist** (3:1). He was the front man for Jesus, the one who came to prepare his way. John came **preaching in the wilderness of Judea** and calling people to **repent** (3:1-2). Here Matthew quotes Isaiah who prophesied that this **voice . . . in the wilderness** would come to **prepare the way for the Lord** (3:3).

The wilderness (then and now) is not a place of comfort and excitement. It's a barren place of preparation and development for what God is planning to do. John preached a revival in the wilderness, essentially telling the people, "The Messiah is coming, so you'd better get ready!" *Repentance* is essential for experiencing the presence and grace of God. It involves changing the mind in order to reverse direction. It is the inner resolve and determination to turn from sin and turn to God. So what's the motivation for repenting? **The kingdom of heaven has come near** (3:2). John wanted people to know that the King had arrived, and his promised earthly kingdom was ready to burst on the scene. Heaven had come to visit earth.

3:4-6 John's austere lifestyle, odd wardrobe, and confrontational preaching were reminiscent of another of God's messengers: **Elijah** (see, for example, 2 Kgs 1:3-17). As the **people from Jerusalem and Judea** heard John's message, they **were baptized by him** and confessed **their sins** (3:5-6). To

confess means to agree with. So by confessing their sins and being baptized, the people were making a public declaration that they had changed their minds and agreed with what God said about their sins. If you want to experience heaven's visitation in your history, true repentance can get you there.

3:7-10 The Jewish religious leaders, **the Pharisees and Sadducees**, also came to hear John. But they got an earful when he called them a bunch of venomous snakes (3:7)! Why did John accept other people but not this group? Because, although they were OK with listening to his message, they wanted their lives left alone. Like some people today, they didn't mind attending a church service as long as it didn't affect how they were running their own affairs. They wanted information, but not transformation. That's why John challenged them to **produce fruit consistent with repentance** (3:8).

Genuine repentance is confirmed by actions. When I travel, I tell the airline agent, "I'm Tony Evans, and I have a reservation." The agent then asks, "Can I see your proof of identification?" They don't want mere communication that I am who I claim to be; they want authentication. Therefore, they want to see something that verifies what I affirm. Similarly, shouting, "Hallelujah! Amen! Praise the Lord!" is fine but insufficient. Repentance shows up in your hands and feet,

not just in your lips. Without the fruit, the visible proof of true heart repentance, judgment is coming (3:10).

3:11 In light of the people's repentance, John baptized them **with water**. But **the one . . . coming** after him would baptize them **with the Holy Spirit**. John's declaration corresponds to the promise of the prophets (see Ezek 36:27; Joel 2:28), and the confirmation of Jesus (see John 14:16-17; 15:26; Acts 1:4-5), and the fulfillment in the early church (see Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-45).

The triune God is one God in three persons. The person at work on earth today is the Holy Spirit. Without a relationship to God the Holy Spirit, in fact, there is no relationship to God the Son. And without a relationship to God the Son, there is no relationship to God the Father. It is your relationship to the Holy Spirit that determines how much of Jesus the Son and God the Father you experience today.

3:12 John described the Messiah as having a **winnowing shovel . . . in his hand**. Such an implement was used to separate **wheat** from **chaff**. A farmer would winnow the grain by tossing it in the air. The wind would blow away the chaff—the useless husks—while the wheat would fall to the **threshing floor**. The wheat would then be gathered up, and the chaff would be burned. Those who will not repent and receive Jesus will experience the eternal wrath of God for their sins **with fire that never goes out**.

3:13-15 When **Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan River**, **John tried to stop him** (3:13-14). Since John's message was about repentance, he considered it inappropriate and inconceivable that he would baptize the Messiah, because Jesus had nothing to repent of. Instead, John told him, **I need to be baptized by you** (3:14). But Jesus insisted on being baptized because doing so was **the way . . . to fulfill all righteousness** (3:15).

In his substitutionary death on the cross, Jesus would bear the transgressions of sinners and credit them with his perfect righteousness (see 2 Cor 5:21). So as his ministry began, he intended to identify with sinful

humanity on whose behalf he would perfectly fulfill all the demands of God's law. This baptism would also identify Jesus with John and affirm his kingdom message.

3:16-17 At Jesus's baptism, we see a Trinitarian affirmation. All three members of the Godhead inaugurated Jesus's public ministry. As Jesus rose from the water, **the Spirit of God descended on him like a dove** (3:16), and **the voice of God the Father proclaimed, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased** (3:17). No other ministry commissioning service can compare to this one. The Father and the Spirit publicly endorsed the Son for his kingdom mission. Thus, he was prepared for battle with the enemy (4:1-11).

4:1 The first thing to notice about the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11 is that it was God's idea: **Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil**. This tells us God was not on the defensive in this matter. He was on the offensive, demonstrating the superiority of his Son over Satan.

In fact, this is why God allows us to be tempted by the devil—so he can demonstrate the superiority of Jesus Christ. God created humanity constitutionally lower than the angels (see Heb 2:7)—including fallen angels like the devil—to show what he could do with less (humans) when that less is committed to him, than he could with more (angels) when that more is in rebellion to him. Temptation, then, provides you with an opportunity to validate this truth: "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Why did God test his Son this way? The Bible describes Jesus as the "second Adam" or "last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45, 47). The first Adam was tested in the garden, gave in to Satan, and got the human race kicked into the wilderness. The second Adam went into the wilderness to defeat Satan so that he can escort us back to the garden.

4:2 **Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights**. To fast is to give up a physical craving to fulfill a greater spiritual need. It involves a switching of priorities. Fasting prioritizes prayer and fellowship with God to feed the

spirit instead of the stomach. After forty days, Jesus **was hungry**—and ready for battle.

4:3 The tempter began by saying, **If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.** This tells us the devil had been watching Jesus go without food. He knows what you're up to, too, and directs his temptations accordingly. In this situation, Satan questioned the provision of God: Jesus was hungry. God hadn't fed him. Why shouldn't Jesus just make what was needed?

4:4 How did Jesus respond? By quoting Scripture: **It is written.** If Jesus, the living Word, needed to use the written Word to deal with the enemy of the Word, how much more do you? He gave you the Bible so you could wield it like a sword (see Eph 6:17).

Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3: **Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.** In this passage, Moses explained to Israel how they survived through the wilderness: by God's provision. They didn't survive merely because of the manna but because of the one who provided it. Was Jesus hungry? Yes. But he was willing to trust God to provide rather than to act independently of him.

4:5-6 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem to the **pinnacle of the temple** and said, **If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down** (4:5-6). Challenging Jesus to jump to his death doesn't sound like much of a temptation. But notice that he supported his appeal by quoting God's promise of angelic protection in Psalm 91:11-12 (4:6). Jesus, then, had an opportunity to demonstrate he was the Messiah for all Jerusalem to see. The problem was that doing so ignored God's plan. Satan urged Jesus to fulfill God's will for his life in a way that would bypass the cross.

Oh, yes—the devil knows the Bible, and he uses it. If he can't convince you to act independently of God, he'll work through your religion. But God doesn't need Satan's help to get you where he wants you to go.

4:7 Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16: **Do not test the Lord your God.** In other words, he knew we are never to use disobedience to

back God into a corner in order to force him to fulfill his plan.

4:8-9 Finally, the devil showed Jesus **all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor** (4:8). Then he quit playing around and got to the bottom line: **I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me** (4:9). In the end, Satan wants your worship; he wants you to bow. That's what he got from Adam and Eve in the garden, and that's what he seeks from you. He'll make nice offers to get you to do so, but it's never worth the price.

4:10 Jesus had finally had enough: **Go away, Satan!** His absolute authority is on display in this command. Then Jesus quoted once again from Deuteronomy: **Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him** (Deut 6:13). Worship is reserved for the one true and living God.

If you're a Christian, you have no obligation to the devil, and you have Jesus's delegated authority against Satan. "Resist the devil [with the word and in obedience to God], and he will flee from you [as he fled from Christ]" (James 4:7). Too often we come to worship God on Sunday and then serve lesser agendas and gods the rest of the week. But if Jesus is the ultimate authority in the universe, he deserves your exclusive worship and service.

4:11 How did this battle end? **The devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.** Satan is unable to handle a righteous life that consistently confronts him with God's Word. The true King has all authority and perfectly obeyed God. So the usurper had to retreat. When the fallen angel left, faithful angels came and fulfilled their rightful role: serving Christ and giving him the worship he deserved.

4:12-17 John the Baptist was **arrested** by Herod Antipas (see Matt 14:1-12), so Jesus **withdrew into Galilee** and lived in **Caper-naum . . . in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali** (4:12-13). This fulfilled Isaiah 9:1-2, which said that those living in **darkness** in Galilee would see a **great light** (4:14-16). That's when Jesus's public ministry officially began—and he preached in continuity with

the kingdom message of John: **Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near** (4:17; see 3:2).

4:18-22 In these verses we have the calling of the first disciples: **Peter and his brother Andrew** (4:18-20), and **James and his brother John**, the sons of Zebedee (4:21-22). All four men were fishermen. And when Jesus called them to follow him, he said, **I will make you fish for people** (4:19).

There's an important principle here. If you're not fishing, you're not following. If your Christian life does not involve evangelizing the lost, you're not functioning like the disciple Jesus intends you to be. Evangelism includes sharing the gospel and intentionally seeking to convert the hearer to faith in Jesus Christ.

When called, Peter, Andrew, James, and John **immediately** left their jobs and

followed Jesus (4:20, 22). Not every believer is called to a full-time Christian vocation, but every believer is called to be a full-time Christian. That means that following Christ must be your number one priority.

4:23-25 Matthew tells us the hallmarks of Jesus ministry as he traveled throughout Galilee: **teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people** (4:23). *Teaching* involves clearly articulating the content of the message. *Preaching* includes calling for a response to what is taught. *Healing* consists of a visible demonstration of the power of the message. As Jesus did these things, **the news about him spread, and large crowds followed him** (4:24-25). When he taught, preached, and healed, there was standing room only.

III. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (5:1-7:29)

5:1-2 When the crowds came to Jesus, he **went up on the mountain, sat down, and began to teach**. Matthew 5-7 is known as the Sermon on the Mount. It's Jesus's kingdom manifesto. In this sermon, he explained what the kingdom is, how it works, and what it ought to look like.

The first few verses of the Sermon on the Mount are known as the Beatitudes (5:3-10); they set forth the character of kingdom men and women. Jesus spoke primarily to those who were his disciples in order to take them to the next level. We could call the Beatitudes antibiotics from God's pharmacy that can aid life transformation. Each one includes a blessing, which is the God-given capacity to enjoy his goodness in your life and to extend that goodness to others.

Jesus pronounced these blessings on people with a kingdom mindset—those who consciously and unapologetically align their lives under the rule of God. The blessings are for those who reject religious externalism. Jesus is primarily concerned with what's happening on your inside, which should be the basis of what you're showing on the outside.

5:3 **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.** To be "poor in spirit" is to be in spiritual poverty, to be conscious of one's continual dependence on God. Kingdom people recognize their own inadequacy and insufficiency apart from him. As long as you think you are rich in spirit, you'll actually be independent and proud. So become a spiritual beggar.

God's *kingdom* refers to God's *rule*. If you are poor in spirit, you will get to see God's heavenly rule in your earthly life. Only by being desperately dependent on God can you become what he created you to be.

5:4 **Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted** refers to being saddened by the things that sadden God. God grieves over the sin and wretchedness of the world (see Gen 6:5-6). Jesus lamented the disobedience of Jerusalem (Matt 23:37) and wept over the existence of death, which sin had produced (John 11:35). We must not laugh at or excuse that which causes God to mourn. Sin and its consequences surround us, so that we are tempted to become numb. Instead, we must pray that God would give us the

emotions of his heart, so that we can experience the comfort of God to encourage and strengthen us.

5:5 Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth. Some translations render “the humble” as “the meek.” It’s important to understand that meekness doesn’t mean weakness. Consider, for example, the process of breaking a horse. The idea is not to break the horse of its strength or speed; rather, the goal is to break the horse of its self-will. As long as you remain independent and “wild,” you will never maximize God’s intention for you. To be meek is to learn to submit your will to God’s. Those who do will inherit what God has allotted for them.

5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. This blessing is about having the right spiritual appetite. Far too many of God’s children are malnourished—not because they don’t eat, but because they eat the wrong things. Donuts taste good, but they have no nutritional value. You can’t have a donut-level spiritual diet and then wonder why you don’t experience God’s blessings. To hunger for righteousness is to apply the righteous standard of God to your life. You need to be hungry for that which pleases God. If you train your appetite in this way you will be filled—that is, you’ll be satisfied with divine contentment. Discontentment will give way to satisfaction in God.

5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. To receive mercy is to not get what you deserve, to receive pity instead of just condemnation. Rather, when you’re guilty, mercy removes the misery you ought to receive. There’s a blessing for those who extend it, because you can bank on the fact that a time is coming when you’ll need mercy. This is the Golden Rule in action: “Whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them” (Matt 7:12).

5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Purity of heart involves being authentic, and this begins with honesty before God. Prayer for many people is a stale practice because there is no raw

conversation with God—respectful but raw. We must go to God with our hearts completely open because we’re not hiding anything from him; he knows everything already. So come clean with him about the good, the bad, and the ugly, and you’ll see him operating powerfully in your life.

5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. To be at peace is to be in harmony. To be a peacemaker is to be a mediator and resolve conflicts between estranged parties—whether individuals or groups. You make peace by identifying the truth, addressing the sin, and constructing a bridge between those who are at odds with one another. Peacemaking can be difficult work. But, if we persevere in it, we will be called “sons of God” because we will resemble our Daddy. He sent *the* Son of God to be our mediator, bridging the gap created by our sin and granting us peace with him.

5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs isn’t about being persecuted because of wickedness. Instead it’s about being mistreated because you display the kingdom characteristics described in 5:3-9, and some people won’t like you for doing so. Persecution may take a variety of forms and come from a variety of sources (family, an employer, the culture, the government). But in receiving it you’ll be in the company of a class of people (see Heb 11) of whom the world is not worthy (Heb 11:38). If you’re willing to be rejected by men to be accepted by God, the kingdom of heaven is yours.

5:11-12 These verses expand on the idea in 5:10. It’s hard to believe that undergoing persecution is a blessing, but Jesus wanted his disciples to know that he was serious. Notice that the persecution that brings blessing is directly tied to Jesus. **When they insult you and tell lies about you because of Jesus, you are blessed** (5:11). Since essentially the same thing happened to the Old Testament prophets, you’re in good company. But how can you **be glad and rejoice** in the midst of the mess? You can remember that **your reward is great** (5:12). God knows how to deliver. And as Paul told the Romans “The

sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us" (Rom 8:18).

5:13 After describing the character of kingdom people, Jesus described the impact and influence of kingdom people. He told his disciples, **You are the salt of the earth**. Before the advent of refrigeration, people used salt to preserve food. Salting down a piece of meat slowed the decaying process. Notice that Jesus didn't tell them, "You are the salt of the shaker." Since it's under the curse of sin, the earth is like a decaying piece of meat. And salt can't preserve meat if it stays in the shaker.

For salt to **lose its taste** is to lose its uniqueness. Christians are to be salt in a decaying world. But if you become too mixed up with the world and allow its values to affect you, you will lose your uniqueness as a Christian and your ability to make a kingdom difference. Remember, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed—not only because of wicked people—but also because there weren't enough righteous people there to prevent God's judgment (see Gen 18:16–19:29).

5:14 **You are the light of the world**. Light has only one job: to shine. In Scripture, the world is pictured as a dark place that requires illumination (see John 1:5; 3:19). Jesus is "the light of the world" (John 8:12), so he expects his followers to be lights too.

5:15-16 **A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket** (5:15). In other words, you're not to be a private Christian. Your faith must go public. There are to be no covert, secret agent Christians in the church. Are you a light among your family and acquaintances? Are you a light at work and at the gym? Are you a light in your culture and in your community? To hide a light is contradictory to its purpose. **Let your light shine** (5:16).

You must shine so that people **may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven** (5:16). Non-Christians are capable of doing good things, so what does Jesus mean by "good works"? Good works are connected to the kingdom work of God

(see Eph 2:10). A good work is a righteous and biblically authorized action that is beneficial to others and for which God gets the credit. So, unless God is a part of it, it's not a good work. It's merely a good thing. Our good works are accomplished so that we may glorify—that is, highlight, put on display, and make a big deal of—God.

5:17-20 Jesus did not come in opposition to **the Law or the Prophets** (which is a way of referring to the Old Testament); he came to **fulfill** them (5:17). The Old Testament was intended to point to Christ, who'd bring it to its God-intended consummation. He, in fact, is the theme of the Old Testament Scriptures (see Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39-40). In order to provide us with righteousness, making us acceptable before God, he had to live a life of complete obedience to God's law. Not only is each letter of the Bible vital, but so is each part (or **stroke**) of each **letter** (5:18). God's Word is entirely authoritative, and Jesus submitted to it perfectly, allowing him to impart perfect righteousness to those who place personal faith in him (see 2 Cor 5:21). Christ calls them to follow him in obedience to the law—not for salvation but for sanctification, so they may see the kingdom rule of God in their lives.

Unless, as a disciple of Jesus, you are committed to growing in righteousness, the heavenly kingdom will not be expressed in your earthly history. As we will see, **the scribes and Pharisees** were concerned only with external righteousness (5:19-20).

5:21-22 After addressing God's commands in general, Jesus spoke about some specific commands. Six times in this chapter he said, **You have heard that it was said . . . but I tell you . . .** (5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44) so that he might offer a corrective to some misunderstandings.

Do not murder was one of the Ten Commandments that all Jews knew (5:21). But Jesus said if you are **angry with [your] brother or sister** or use vicious words toward them, you are guilty of breaking the law (5:22). That takes God's standards to a whole new level. It tells us God not only considers our actions but also our thoughts and words, and it provides us a deeper understanding

of the law. Jesus demonstrated that God is concerned with the motives of the heart.

5:23-26 So if you come to worship and remember that you are at odds with your brother, **go and be reconciled with him** (5:23-24). Jesus emphasized the connection between the vertical and the horizontal. In order to have a healthy vertical relationship—intimacy and fellowship with God—you must maintain your horizontal relationships with others. Make peace with your adversary inasmuch as it depends on you. Be reconciled before he takes legal action or the consequences of your dispute become worse (5:25-26).

5:27-30 Sexual purity involves more than avoiding a physical act. It too involves the heart. **Do not commit adultery** (5:27) was another of the Ten Commandments that many Jews probably assumed they could check on a list of sins successfully dodged. But Jesus said that looking at a **woman lustfully** is to **commit adultery with her in [your] heart** (5:28). Immoral actions, then, begin with immoral thoughts—and the immoral thoughts are evil too. You can't address sin by only dealing with external actions.

In today's world, pornography is a huge stumbling block to moral purity and a clear example of the kind of sin that Jesus warned against. Jesus wants his disciples to be so radical for moral purity that they're willing to **cut . . . off** anything that draws them to sin (5:29-30). He's not calling for physical mutilation (again, sin is a matter of the heart and not merely the eyes and hands); instead, he's calling for a radical approach to avoiding sin.

5:31-32 The Jewish religious leaders had varying understandings of divorce. Some thought you could divorce for any reason. But Jesus limited divorce. He said, a man who **divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery** because such an action would drive her to marry another. (In the first century, marriage provided a woman with necessary economic support.) Moreover, the one who **marries such a woman commits adultery** (5:32). Why? Because hers was an illegitimate divorce unsanctioned by God. Marriage

vows are to be viewed as sacred and permanent. Notice that it is the person seeking the illegitimate divorce who is blamed for the sin—not the woman who remarries.

5:33-37 Jesus didn't deny the legitimacy of all oath-taking. We find oaths in the Old Testament, as when covenant relationships were established. Jesus, then, was warning against careless, profane, and flippant uses of oaths in everyday speech. An oath shouldn't be used to convince someone of the truthfulness of what you're saying; that might only be a cover-up for deception. Remember, anything in creation that you swear by is under God's authority. So speak with truthfulness. **Let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no'** (5:37).

5:38-42 Kingdom people think and live differently than those in the culture around them. The Old Testament principle **an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth** (5:38; see Lev 24:20) was intended to keep justice fair and limited. Punishment was to be in proportion to the crime. But Jesus wanted his followers to develop a servant mindset. He thus presented several scenarios with the same emphasis (5:39-42): Your spirit of servanthood must go beyond what is required and extend even to those who mistreat you.

If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two (5:41). This example refers to the practice of Roman soldiers forcing civilians to carry their packs for up to a mile. According to Jesus, servanthood should be such a dominant orientation in kingdom people that we are willing to go the extra mile even for people who don't like us. This doesn't involve placing yourself into an abusive situation, however. Nor does it mean there are no limitations. Instead, as Paul says, it means not repaying "evil for evil . . . but [conquering] evil with good" (Rom 12:17, 21).

5:43-48 God's law commanded, **Love your neighbor** (see Lev 19:18). The natural conclusion for many Jews, though, was that you could **hate your enemy** (5:43). Jesus turned that thinking on its head. Instead, he said, you must **love your enemies** (5:44). To do so is a simple reflection of the character of **your Father in heaven**. It's a reminder that God

doesn't show kindness only to believers. He extends common grace to all, meaning that there are certain blessings that he gives to all people. For instance, **he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good** (5:45). You don't have to be a Christian to feel the sun shine and to breathe oxygen.

Jesus expects the behavior of his disciples to stand out in a sinful world. Even wicked people will look out for those who look out for them (5:46). So, if you love only those in your circle who like you, **what are you doing out of the ordinary?** (5:47).

To **be perfect** as God is perfect (5:48) does not mean to be sinless; rather, it means to love others—in the power of the Holy Spirit—by seeking their best interests as a reflection of God's character. To do this even for people you don't like. Loving your neighbor doesn't require having warm and fuzzy feelings for him; it means seeking his well-being.

6:1-4 Jesus wanted his followers to be kingdom people, but he didn't want them to do kingdom activities in order to be praised by others: **Be careful not to practice your righteousness . . . to be seen** (6:1). He gives three examples of practicing righteousness: giving to the poor (6:2-4), praying (6:5-8), and fasting (6:16-18). These are all good, legitimate practices. But we mustn't do them for public recognition.

To do so is to be a hypocrite (6:2, 5, 16)—that is, to be a play actor, giving an external appearance of spirituality without an accompanying internal reality. In the old western movies, they would create a town that appeared to be full of buildings. But each structure was a façade. A building might look like a saloon from the front, but there was nothing on the other side of its door. Such a movie set gave a false impression.

When you give money to those in need (whether directly or through your church or another ministry), **don't sound a trumpet and don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing** (6:2-3). In other words, don't brag about your giving to let others know how generous you are. Those who announce their giving **have their reward** (6:2) and receive nothing from God (6:1). So, if you're playing for the applause of people, you have all you're going to get.

But give in secret, and then your Father will reward you (6:4).

6:5-8 Likewise, when you pray, don't do it for the applause of people (6:5). The hypocritical religious leaders would pray in public to be seen. Sometimes you're going to be called upon to pray in public. But, if you do it to put on a show, that's a problem.

Do you pray in public while God never hears from you in private? **Go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father** (6:6). And **don't babble like the Gentiles**, using meaningless repetition and uttering chants, thinking that God hears you because of your many words (6:7).

6:9 When Jesus said, "whenever/when you pray" (6:5-7), he assumed that disciples pray. What is prayer? You don't need to attend seminary to understand it. Put simply, prayer is talking with God; it's communication with him. The religious leaders sounded fancy when they prayed, but they did it to impress others (6:5). You don't have to use fancy theological words.

How, then, should a disciple pray? Jesus showed them: **You should pray like this**. He wasn't giving them a prayer to repeat but guidelines to provide prayer categories—a prayer template, if you will.

Opening with **our Father in heaven** reminds us that when Christians pray, they're addressing their Daddy, their heavenly Father. Some people have had bad fathers and say they can't relate to God as Father, but we are not to measure our heavenly Father by the standard of our earthly ones. Rather, we are to measure our earthly fathers by the standard of our heavenly Father—who is perfect. He is the ultimate definition of what a father is. Notice also that he is **our** Father (so you're not the only kid in the family), and he is in heaven (a reminder that heaven overrules earth).

What should we ask of our heavenly Father? First, we must pray that his name would be **honored as holy**. When Scripture talks about God's "name," it's referring to who he is, his character. To honor him as "holy" is to treat him as unique—in a class by himself. He is the Creator of all and the only one deserving of worship.

6:10 In the phrase **your kingdom come**, Jesus calls his disciples to make a pledge of allegiance to the kingdom of God—to God's rule over his creation. But, if you want to know his kingdom purpose for your life, you must be committed to *his* kingdom agenda. When the U.S. Olympic athletes are awarded gold medals, they don't get to choose the songs they hear at the accompanying ceremony. They are representatives of our nation, so the song played is the national anthem of the U.S. Similarly, you are called to march to *God's* tune.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven suggests that if we're following God's agenda, we'll want his heavenly will to be done in our earthly history. So, what is God's "will"? God's will is what God wants—when, where, and how he wants it. Those who are part of God's family are to follow God's rules. He's sovereign, and he'll accomplish his purposes with you or without you. The question is, Will you get to take part in it? Remember, he's not limited to our obedience.

6:11 Once we align ourselves to God's program, that's where our requests come in. **Give us today our daily bread.** First, you ask God to meet your daily needs so you can fulfill his plan. God doesn't establish a program that he doesn't fund. Nevertheless, our requests for his provision are to be "daily." This is a reminder that you are dependent on him all day, every day. Just as the Israelites relied on God to provide manna regularly in the wilderness, so you are to live your life in dependence on God—one day at a time.

6:12 **Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors** relates to sins. When God forgives, he no longer credits sin to your account. And as we have been forgiven by God, so we are to forgive the sins others commit against us.

Some people have been seriously sinned against. They have endured horrific cruelty. Nevertheless, the Bible teaches that anything that comes a believer's way—the good, the bad, and the ugly—has to come through God's fingers. God is sovereign, and he permits things for the good of his children—even when we don't understand. Just as in the story of Joseph, human beings may

intend to do evil against us, but God intends even that for good (see Gen 50:20).

6:13 **Do not bring us into temptation** requires that we face facts. Satan is smarter than us and has centuries of experience ruining human lives. So ask God to keep you from getting into situations that detour you from the kingdom road. Pray that he would deliver you from temptations that you're not ready to handle.

6:14-15 Though Jesus emphasized forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer (6:12), he returns to it here. Don't miss that God's forgiveness is conditioned on your forgiveness of others. Jesus isn't talking about salvation here, though, but about our fellowship with God after we're saved, as a part of our discipleship. To forgive is to hold a grudge no longer, not to seek retribution. Since we all need God's forgiveness regularly, we must not withhold it from others. If we do, we'll lose out on fellowship with God.

6:16-18 As with giving and praying, Jesus exhorted his followers not to fast for public recognition. The fact that he says, **Whenever you fast** (6:16), tells us he considers fasting a legitimate spiritual discipline. To fast is to temporarily give up a bodily craving—typically food—because of a spiritual need. Instead of eating, then, you devote yourself to prayer **in secret** (6:18), seeking God's kingdom intervention. But, if your goal in avoiding food is for other people to celebrate how spiritual you look, then their approval will be your **reward** (6:16).

6:19-24 In these verses, Jesus emphasizes the spiritual over the physical. Everyone collects **treasures on earth**. But they don't last (6:19). Heavenly treasures are a far better investment. They're eternal and imperishable (6:20). **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also** (6:21). Store your treasure where you want your heart to be. Your heart will follow your treasure.

In order to focus on heaven and store treasure there, you have to see clearly. **The eye is the lamp of the body** (6:22). Either you let light in through your eyes, or you remain in darkness. It's that simple. And unless