

A photograph of a person sitting in a dimly lit room, reading a book. The person is wearing a light-colored shirt and blue jeans. The background is a blue curtain. The text is overlaid on the image.

*21 Days of*  
**DWELLING**

SEEKING GOD: FASTING, PRAYER, & SCRIPTURE



**21 Days of Dwelling**  
**Week 3**  
**Following Jesus Through the Sermon on the Mount**

**Day 15**

**<sup>25</sup> “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? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life<sup>[a]</sup>?”**

**<sup>28</sup> “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**

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Jesus begins this section with “therefore.” That means the foundation for what follows is found in what He just told us. Going back to Day 13 from last week, we learned that we can store up treasures in only two places: on earth or in heaven. How we spend our time, skills/talents & money direct which storehouse our treasure is going to. Our earthly storehouse won’t last but our heavenly storehouse will not only last for eternity but earn interest as well!

The truth is that it’s hard to spend what we have on a Kingdom agenda instead of our own agenda. I’ll be honest, as I was writing the Questions for Reflection on Day 13, I cringed a little bit at the idea of a time budget. Often, it is easier for me to give of my money than it is my time.

That’s why I want to remind us that we do these things under the protective covering of the grace and mercies of God. The point of all of us learning from Jesus through

The Sermon on the Mount is not to beat ourselves up when we see that we fall short. It's also not to strive so hard to make sure we are doing everything we should. The point is to draw near to Jesus, love Him, be loved by Him, see where we fall short, rest in grace, ask the Holy Spirit to help us change and then take the necessary steps to partner with the Holy Spirit as He works in us and through us.

Jesus knows that these things are hard for us too. That's why, after laying the foundational truths about where treasures are stored, he says, "therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life." Jesus knows that our first thought, when we find that we are supposed to be serving and giving towards His kingdom, will be "what about me? There are things I need. What if there is not enough time and money left for me."

Jesus answers those questions in the most beautiful way. He describes how important we are to God. He asks us to look to nature and see how well God cares for the animals who don't have a job and can't go to the grocery store, yet they are fed. He points out the beauty of the flowers. Have you ever thought about the fact that God didn't have to make such beauty? Yet, the beauty and splendor of nature show us something about the character of God. He cares that we are clothed well. To top it off, Jesus assures us that we are of much more value to Him than the animals and the flowers.

Jesus was originally speaking this message to a group of people who didn't just live paycheck to paycheck, they lived meal to meal. As I type this, I have a closet full of clothes and a refrigerator full of food. Yet I still worry. I imagine that a first century Jew would be astounded that we could worry about anything if they saw our cupboards, cars, grocery stores and wardrobes. Worrying is not only a problem for the poor and those who don't have enough food. It's universal. What is Jesus' solution to worrying?

#### 1. Have faith in your Father

Remember the parable of the bags of gold? The wicked servant had an improper view of the Master. He believed that the Master was hard and, in fear, he hoarded what was given to him.

When you think of the way God views you, do you believe that you are dearly loved? Do you trust that God is attentive to you and the minute details of your life? Do you know to your very core that God has good planned for you and not harm?

**Colossians 3:12** <sup>12</sup>Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

**Luke 12:7** <sup>7</sup>Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

**Romans 8:28** <sup>28</sup>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who <sup>[a]</sup> have been called according to his purpose.

**Ephesians 2:10** <sup>10</sup>For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Your Heavenly Father wants you. He is for you. He has good plans for you. He can even take the things that don't seem good and work them out so that they ultimately bring you good.

When we believe these things, we can take risks, we can have courage, we can even have the freedom to fail. We can unclench our fingers from the things we worry about and know that our God is faithful. As a matter of fact, God doesn't just want us to unclench our fingers from our worries, He wants us to throw them on Him.

**1 Peter 5:6-7** <sup>6</sup>Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. <sup>7</sup>Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

**Philippians 4:6-7** <sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

## 2. Get your focus off yourself

Jesus goes on to tell us that if we are seeking the things of His kingdom above everything else, He'll take care of all those things we are worried about. This doesn't mean you'll get everything you want if you serve Jesus with all your heart. You may really want that beautiful home you saved on Zillow. You may never get it. But if your heart is tethered to heaven instead of earth, you will find more rewards both on earth and in heaven, in your little apartment than you would in that mini-mansion.

What if we started daydreaming about things we could do for the Kingdom of God and how we could give and serve Him more than we pinned all the things we want onto our Pinterest boards?

### 3. Focus on today

A big part of our worries is our “what if” fears. When we worry about what might happen, we are facing struggles, hardships and difficulties without the strength and mercies of God. When God walks with you through a difficult time, He provides the power, encouragement, wisdom and comfort to navigate it. He also promises to bring good from that hardship. When we create a difficult time in our head, we are on our own, trying to navigate a scenario that God hasn’t asked us to walk through.

Yes, we are to prepare for things we see coming. If we think it’s going to rain, we roll up our car windows. When we see storms brewing, preparation is wise. But worrying about being crushed by a storm that we fear may come robs us of the joy and peace that God intends us to walk in.

When we seek His Kingdom first; when we fix our hopes, dreams and plans there, God promises to take care of the more minor concerns of our lives. We get to walk in the blessing of His provision plus effectiveness beyond our imaginations for His Kingdom.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was a young British Member of Parliament named William Wilberforce. He was extraordinarily wealthy, charming, brilliant and well-liked by everyone who knew him. He was a decent man who didn’t have any great character flaws according to the morality of the day.

While on a trip to France with a friend, he became convinced that Jesus needed to save him, and he needed to become a follower of Jesus. He called his conversion “the great change.” At first, he thought that meant leaving Parliament and going into ministry. After much counsel, he felt that God was directing him to stay in government and serve the Lord there.

In his biography by Eric Metaxas it says, “Two changes manifested themselves right away: the first was a new attitude toward money, the second toward time. Before ‘the great change,’ Wilberforce had reckoned his money and time his own, to do with as he pleased, and had lived accordingly. But suddenly he knew that this could no longer be the case. The Scriptures were plain and could not be gainsaid on this most basic point: all that was his – his wealth, his talents, his time was not really his. It all

belonged to God and had been given to him to use for God's purposes and according to God's will."

Upon coming to Christ, Wilberforce mourned all the time he had spent in idle pursuits. Metaxas continues, "He saw, so to speak, the full horror of himself. God, in his mercy, had allowed Wilberforce to see himself as he truly was, and it was crushing. But Wilberforce knew God didn't mean to end there. On the other side of the worst of who he was, if he dared face that worst, was a God who would help him overcome his faults and do great things, the very things for which He had created him. It was not too late."

William Wilberforce went on to push legislation that improved conditions for the poor, children, animals and prisoners. He often opened his home to feed the poor. His crowning and most difficult achievement was the abolishment of the slave trade in England. He spent years fighting that fight and suffered much for it. But God was there in every one of his tomorrows to give him the strength he needed to accomplish His will.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. God is not a killjoy. He wants you to laugh, have fun and have things that will delight you. He does not want you to have those things at the expense of His Kingdom priorities. Spend some time asking the Holy Spirit to search your heart in 3 areas: time, money and skills/talents. Are you seeking His kingdom first with the resources He has given you? If He reveals an area where you are hoarding His gifts, ask Him what He would have you do about that.
2. God will give you the strength you need for whatever you go through tomorrow. What is something you need from Him today? What are the worries you have about the future? Remember from Week 11, we are to ask for our DAILY bread. Ask Him for your needs today. Now be honest with Him about your worries for tomorrow and picture yourself throwing them at His feet.

**Now Let's SOAP**

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

## Day 16

**Matthew 7:1-6** “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup> For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

<sup>3</sup> “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? <sup>4</sup> How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

<sup>6</sup> “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

The Greek word here for “judge” is “krino.” It means to determine, condemn, go to law, call in to question, punish.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells the church:

**1 Corinthians 5:12-13** <sup>12</sup> What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? <sup>13</sup> God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.”

The Greek word that Paul uses here for “judge” is the same word that Jesus used in Matthew. So, we have to ask the question again, is scripture contradicting itself? Are we supposed to judge or are we not supposed to judge? To get to the bottom of this, we are going to explore some more questions.

Before we get into our questions, I want to make an important distinction. Walking in judgement and discernment are two different things. We will be talking about discernment on Day 19. Every Christian needs to be operating in discernment. To discern is to recognize, perceive or ascertain who or what something is. As you can see, to judge and discern are slightly different. Today we are going to focus on judging.



## Can a Christian judge another person?

It depends. Christians are to be so separated from the world that we fall into two different categories when it comes to judging: those who are in The Church and those who are not.

Those who are not followers of Jesus do not have to obey Him, align their priorities to His, or conform to His image. They can do as they please. Since scripture tells us they are slaves to sin, they will sin. As long as they do not call themselves Christians, we do not condemn, punish or determine what their fate will be. That is in the hands of God who has seen them from birth to the present and is the only one capable of administering justice.

Those who are our fellow believers can be judged by their church for the good of both the church and the person who is in unrepentant sin. In the case in 1 Corinthians, a man was sleeping with his father's wife. Paul was horrified and declared that the pagans don't even act like that. The Corinthian church was proud of the way they were showing grace to this man and not confronting him about it. The problem was that he was putting himself in danger. He was giving the devil a foothold, through his sin, to bring bondage into his life.

This man was also tarnishing the reputation of the Corinthian church and the name of Christ by his behavior. Paul tells the Corinthians:

**1 Corinthians 5:3-8 I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. <sup>4</sup>So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, <sup>5</sup>hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh,<sup>[a][b]</sup> so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.**

**<sup>6</sup>Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? <sup>7</sup>Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup>Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**

Paul judges this man and tells the church to kick him out for both his good and the good of the church. They are to let him go live in his sin so he will ultimately see the destruction of it. This is not done individually, flippantly, with arrogance or coldness. It is done by church leadership, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Notice in

verses 4-5, Paul instructs them to remove the man when they are assembled and under the power of the Holy Spirit so that the man will come to repentance.

The good news is that this man did repent. In Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth, he says this:

**1 Corinthians 2:6-8** <sup>6</sup> The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. <sup>7</sup> Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup> I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.

Notice that Paul would not allow any grudges or hard feelings toward this man. He was to be welcomed back into the church and loved by all.

Who can judge someone inside the church?

Church leadership, assembled and seeking the Holy Spirit, are the ones who would judge and remove someone from the church. According to the words of Jesus, those who are bringing the discipline should be completely free from the offender's sin. In other words, a church leader who struggles with a sin, should not bring correction to someone struggling with the same sin. That leader needs to remove the plank from their own eye first. If that leader judges someone while operating in the same sin, they will be judged in the same way.

Under what circumstances can someone be removed from the church?

When someone is blatantly sinning and refusing to repent after church leadership has lovingly and scripturally brought it to their attention, they can be removed for the purpose of bringing them to repentance and protecting the church. The goal and hope is that it won't come to that. Jesus tells us to make sure we aren't operating in sin and then lovingly & humbly work with the one who is.

**VERY IMPORTANT:** We are not talking about a person who is struggling with sin. We all sin. We are not talking about immature or new believers who are still learning how to follow Christ. We are talking about someone who has been in Christ long enough to know they are operating in sin, and they just don't care.

**Shouldn't we just let them stay in the church and not make waves?**

No. Jesus says that when we don't address continual, unrepentant sin in the church, we put ourselves in danger. That person will cause problems. In the words of Jesus that person, as they continue to hear pearls of truth, will trample the truth and tear the church to pieces. Paul warns the church that if this man is not removed, sin will spread like yeast through the rest of the body.

**What about those outside the church? Are we never supposed to tell them that they are wrong?**

We should absolutely be sharing the truth with those who do not know Christ. Part of that truth is the reality of God's judgement on those who don't repent of sin.

It really boils down to love and humility. We never condemn or cast judgement on someone because we want to see them get what is coming to them or we think we are in some way superior.

Anyone who finds themselves in a place of needing to bring correction to someone must do it out of love. Their heart must be so broken for the one sinning that they are compelled to step in because they can't bear to see this person in danger.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Have you ever thought about how unrepentant sin is a danger to the church? The more we ignore sin, the harder our hearts become to the truth until we want to trample the truth and tear apart those who speak it. Take some time to ask the Lord to make you ultra-sensitive to sin so that you cannot bear to have it operate in your life.
2. Think about the way you speak and act towards those who are unbelievers, even on social media. Are you judging those who you are supposed to be leaving to God for judgement?

## Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

## Day 17

**Matthew 7:7-12** <sup>7</sup>“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

<sup>9</sup>“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup>If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! <sup>12</sup>So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

God is a good Father who loves us very much!! He wants to give us good things. I know that sometimes we can get frustrated with our asking, seeking and knocking because we feel like we have been met with silence and a shut door. Let's look at the same account of this teaching out of the book of Luke.

**Luke 11:9-13** <sup>9</sup>“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

<sup>11</sup>“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for<sup>[a]</sup> a fish, will give him a snake instead? <sup>12</sup>Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

At first glance, these scriptures can seem to overpromise. All I have to do is ask and it's mine? We all know from experience, that is not true. But we also know that Jesus wouldn't lie to us. Let's take a magnifying glass to what He is saying here to bring some clarity.

Jesus lays out 3 different ways for us to receive from God: Asking, seeking and knocking. They are not the same.

### 1. Ask

“Ask and it will be given to you.” This is my favorite! Have you ever received a quick answer to prayer and you're so thrilled. You feel like you must have gotten the formula right because, whatever you did, God heard and granted.

I own a small candy company. I don't have time for it anymore and I was thinking about closing it. I wasn't sure and asked the Lord what I should do. A few days later, I was talking with a friend and, out of the blue, she asked if she could run my candy company for the 2024 Christmas season so she could decide if she wanted to start a similar business. It turned out great! I asked. God answered. I love it when that happens.

That hasn't always been my experience. Sometimes I've asked and nothing seems to happen. What then?

## 2. Seek

Seeking requires more from us. It requires us to draw near to God and, not only keep asking, but ask Him why we aren't getting an answer. Seeking starts with the belief that God loves you and wants good for you. When we seek Him for an answer, we come expecting that He will show us if something is hindering that answer or if we should be doing something to bring about the answer.

Notice that Luke tells us that The Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. When we don't seem to get an answer to prayer, we need to seek the Lord and ask His Spirit to reveal the reason to us.

As I said, it's my favorite when I ask God for something and, BOOM, there's the answer. But I kinda think that this one is God's favorite because it means that we keep drawing close to Him. When we keep coming to Him because we know that He is the only source for our needs, really good things happen within our own hearts.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit will reveal that we simply aren't ready for the thing we are asking for. Sometimes He is wanting to work out perseverance in us and grow our faith. Sometimes He has good planned for us through telling us "no." Sometimes He will show us that we need to engage in spiritual warfare.

The Apostle Paul showed us a great example of seeking God until he found what he was looking for. Paul was receiving great revelations from the Lord. He was also having trouble with something. We don't know what was bothering him but we know that it was bad because he said he was in torment.

**2 Corinthians 12:7-10** Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup>But he said to me, "My

**grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup>That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

Paul asked God to take this affliction away. No answer. Paul asked again. No answer. Paul kept seeking the Lord until he got his answer. God said, “no,” but gave the reason why. The Holy Spirit revealed to Paul that God was allowing the “thorn” in order to keep him humble. Even though he didn’t get the answer he wanted, Paul did find what he was seeking. God was true to his word and gave Paul the Holy Spirit to give him answers and encouragement. The Holy Spirit also caused him to delight in weaknesses, insults, hardships and persecutions. Paul learned to do what we learned on Day 1. The Holy Spirit changed his attitude toward his “thorn” and now he saw it as a blessing.

So, what if we ask, seek and still don’t hear anything?

### 3. Knock

**Luke 11:5-8 <sup>5</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <sup>6</sup>a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ <sup>7</sup>And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ <sup>8</sup>I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity<sup>[a]</sup> he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.**

I love the phrase “shameless audacity.” The picture here is of someone who just keeps pounding on the door because they know the person inside has what they need. They want it so badly that they are willing to be shamelessly audacious about it. They just won’t stop. This is the same audacity that Jacob had when he wrestled with God.

**Genesis 32:24-29 <sup>24</sup>So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. <sup>25</sup>When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. <sup>26</sup>Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”**

**<sup>27</sup> The man asked him, “What is your name?”**

**“Jacob,” he answered.**

**<sup>28</sup> Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,<sup>[a]</sup> because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”**

**<sup>29</sup> Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.”**

**But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there.**

Jacob was tired and in pain but he kept holding on to God until he was blessed. He would not give up.

I am convinced that God is true to His word in this scripture. Ask him for what’s on your heart. Keep seeking Him to hear His voice. Be audacious and knock until you hear from Him.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Are you waiting for an answer from God? God promises to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. Have you given up after asking? Be brave and ask the Holy Spirit why you haven’t received an answer. Allow the Holy Spirit to show you if you need to change or grow in an area first.

2. **James 4:2-3 <sup>2</sup>You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. <sup>3</sup>When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**

Allow the Holy Spirit to test your motives according to this scripture. This scripture brings us back to examining if we are seeking our own kingdom or the Kingdom of God. Are you asking the Lord for things to spend on your own kingdom?



## Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

## Day 18

**13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**

I have a confession to make. When I first felt the Lord nudging me to study The Sermon on the Mount, I thought it would be lighter. I have read these words of Jesus countless times, and they always bring strength, direction and encouragement to me. As I’ve slowed down, studied and taken a closer look at the details, I’ve realized that much of what Jesus is asking of us here is harder than I thought.

Jesus agrees that it’s hard for us and tells us in these verses that most people won’t do it. There is a common misconception that I’ve heard a lot. It goes something like this: if we truly showed Jesus to the world they wouldn’t hate the church so much. They would love us because Jesus is so loving.

Yes, Jesus is more loving than any of us can fathom. Yet, the world hated Him. Yes, it’s true that we need to show the love of Jesus to the world. It’s also true that sometimes the world hates us because we act badly. But we must come to grips with the fact that the closer we are to Jesus and the more we look like Him, the more we will be hated by those who have rejected Him.

**John 15:18-21 18 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’<sup>[a]</sup> If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.**

The world is fine with a “Jesus” who ate with sinners, healed the sick and loved the poor. If you only preach that “Jesus” they will love you too. As long as your “Jesus” doesn’t ever say anything about sin, dying to your flesh, giving more to God’s Kingdom than your own or any weird supernatural stuff, like being raised from the dead, you’re welcome to travel their big, wide, open road with them.

The Jesus who said:

**Matthew 16:24-26** Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save their life<sup>[a]</sup> will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. <sup>26</sup> What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

**John 14:6** <sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

**Matthew 13:40-43** <sup>40</sup> “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. <sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

This Jesus is definitely not welcome on that wide road. You can't talk about denying yourself on the wide road. You have to be inclusive of all religions on the wide road. And you certainly can't say anything about sin or hell on the wide road. Some of Jesus is welcome on the wide road but Jesus won't go where only part of Him is welcome.

In Matthew 13, Jesus tells us a parable.

**Matthew 13:3-8** <sup>3</sup> Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

The Disciples don't get it, so they ask Jesus to explain it to them.

**Matthew 13:18-23** <sup>18</sup> “Listen then to what the parable of the Sower means: <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their

heart. This is the seed sown along the path. <sup>20</sup>The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>22</sup> The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>23</sup> But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

The statistics of this parable are staggering. According to Jesus, as the word of God is preached, ¼ of the people who hear don't get it and it is stolen from them by the enemy. ¾ of the people who hear the gospel respond. That is most of the people. But notice that that road seems to get narrower and narrower. ¼ of those who respond never grow roots. They don't become disciples of Jesus, so their faith fizzles out. Another ¼ of those who respond care more about seeking their kingdom than the Kingdom of God and their faith is slowly choked out by a love of this world. There is only ¼ that receive the gospel, become rooted in truth and disciplined, and go on to bear fruit.

**2 Corinthians 2:15-16** <sup>15</sup> For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. <sup>16</sup> To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?

Paul tells us that we have a fragrance. That fragrance is pleasing and smells like life to God and our brothers and sisters in Christ, the last ¼. To those who have rejected Christ, the other ¾, we smell like death. Paul then asks who can handle that.

The crowd is on the wide road and they don't want the smell of Christ on that road with them. The narrow road can be hard, I'll admit, but that's the road that Jesus is on. Since Jesus is on that road, it comes with grace, mercy, forgiveness, wisdom, direction, peace, love, power, authority and eternal life. They can have their wide road. I'll take the hard because the benefits of the narrow road can't even compare to hardships we may face while we travel it.

## Questions for Reflection

1. In which group do you see yourself in the Parable of the Sower? Maybe you are reading this devotional, and you have not received the gospel. If you have not brought your sins to Jesus for His cleansing and forgiveness, and begun to follow Him, you can do that right now. Go back to Day 11 and pray, asking Christ to forgive you of your sins and become your Lord. If you want to talk about it more and gain more understanding, visit our Start to Follow table this Sunday.
2. Let's look at the rest of the  $\frac{3}{4}$ . Where is the seed of the gospel in your heart right now? Is it in a shallow place that needs more roots? Get in a Life Group. Do you recognize thorns growing up around your seed? Start removing those weeds from your life. Jesus did not give us this parable to make us fear that we are not saved. He gave us this parable to sober us to the dangers of being unrooted and worldly. Do you see yourself in the final  $\frac{1}{4}$ ? Spend some time asking the Lord to protect the seed within your own heart and the crop you are producing.

## Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

## Day 19

**Matthew 7:15-23** <sup>15</sup> “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. <sup>16</sup> By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

<sup>21</sup> “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

This is a sobering warning from Jesus. False prophets, leaders, teachers and believers are nothing new. The prophets Elijah and Jeremiah both lamented to God that they felt all alone, the only prophets among many speaking the truth. Throughout history we have seen kings, rulers, priests, and whole societies who take the title “Christian” upon themselves without looking the tiniest bit like Jesus. King Henry VIII called himself the head of the Church of England while having affairs, divorcing and beheading his wives according to his whims.

Scripture warns us repeatedly about false leaders in the church. We are even told that they will be more prominent in the last days.

**1 Timothy 4:1-2** The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. <sup>2</sup> Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

**2 Peter 2:1-3** But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. <sup>2</sup> Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. <sup>3</sup> In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

**2 Corinthians 11:13-15** <sup>13</sup>For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup>And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup>It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

When Jesus, Peter and Paul are all warning us about the same thing, we need to open our eyes and pay attention. It's an uncomfortable thought to realize that there are people who quote scripture, lift their hands in worship, pray and even preach who are not truly followers of Jesus.

In the 90's, Jeff was the Youth Pastor at a large church. Our youth group would have over 300 young people in attendance on a Wednesday night. Jeff ran our youth services exactly like a Sunday morning service. We started with worship, then he would preach the word. Often there was time at the end for the students to pray with our leaders. We also had several Life Groups for our students so that they could be disciplined on a more personal level.

A couple who hosted one of our Life Groups befriended a young man named Troy. Troy talked about Jesus non-stop. He had a lot of charisma and could quote scripture like a pro. He began attending their Life Group. People were attracted to Troy like a magnet, and he started to have a lot of influence in the group. After a while, Troy would encourage some of the students to go into another room with him to "laugh in the spirit" while the Life Group leader was teaching the word. The hosts of the group would encourage it. There began to be division. Jeff stepped in and told the LG hosts that nobody was to split off from the group while the leader was teaching.

Those LG hosts and another couple began meeting with Troy on a regular basis. All this time, Troy did not attend our services or express any desire to meet with Jeff or come under his leadership.

A few weeks later, during our Wednesday night service, as soon as Jeff started preaching the word of God, these two couples created a ruckus by "laughing in the spirit" loudly with some of the students who were in their Life Group. Jeff took authority over the disruption and told them to be quiet while the word of God was being preached. After service, Jeff met with both couples. One of the women, Kathy, lashed out at Jeff and told him that he couldn't tell her what to do during service because she was a prophet, and he was just a pastor. Jeff did what we talked about on Day 16. With the backing of the rest of his leaders, he judged that these two



couples were refusing to repent of the sin of rebellion, and he removed them from our youth group.

A few weeks later, these two couples came and joyfully announced that they, along with “apostle Troy” as he called himself now, were starting a church. They had purchased a piece of property with some buildings and homes on it. They were all going to live together. Jeff was concerned about the influence they would have on the ones who had been in their Life Group, most of whom were in the 18–20-year-old range.

Jeff set up meetings with each of these individuals. One young man, Tom, told Jeff that he just wanted more of God. When he was with “apostle Troy” he got excited about the manifestations he saw. He believed those things were of God and moved down to the compound. Whenever we would go on vacation, this group would show up at our youth services and recruit people to join them.

One night I was cooking dinner. Jeff wasn’t home. A mother of an 18-year-old in our youth group called me in tears. She was yelling into the phone, “they’re coming to take her away!” Kathy the “prophet” had come into the home and declared, “god has divided this family with his sword.” I had the mother put Kathy on the phone. I challenged her about what she was doing but the 18-year-old daughter had already packed her bags and went down to the compound with Kathy.

Jeff had had enough. He charged our students that Wednesday from the pulpit to stay away from “apostle” Troy’s group. He warned them of the danger of false teachers. Our senior pastor had also heard some of what was going on. He was concerned but he thought it might just be a misunderstanding. So, he asked Jeff if he, Jeff and “apostle” Troy could meet. Jeff, knowing the importance of submission to authority, agreed to the meeting.

After the meeting was over, our lead pastor turned to Jeff and said, “that guy is a nut.” He went on to give our whole church a similar warning from his pulpit the following Sunday.

That group became a literal cult, on the Sacramento Sheriff’s office’s cult watch list. Troy started moving into weirder and weirder things. He would “prophesy” about who should marry who. He “prophesied” that the wives of the two original couples now needed to be his wives. Tom, who Jeff had begged not to join their group ended up in a mental hospital. The Life Group host couple ended up splitting up, with the woman becoming Troy’s third wife and the man homeless on the streets.

It all started out innocently. There were people who loved the Lord and wanted to know Him more. But they believed the lie of a false teacher who promised them that knowing God didn't come through delving into scripture on their own and spending their own time in prayer and worship, it came through listening to him. He dazzled them with a sprinkling of scripture and exciting manifestations.

So how do we guard ourselves from false teachers?

1. Look at the fruit

**Galatians 5:19-24** <sup>19</sup> The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

It doesn't matter how much charisma they have on a stage or if they "prophesy, drive out demons or perform many miracles." If they are not exhibiting and growing in the fruits of the Spirit, they are false teachers. If they are exhibiting works of the flesh such as jealousy, division, promoting self, without repentance, they may be a false believer. That means that you need to be close enough to someone who is teaching you to be able to see the fruit of their life, not only what they do on a stage.

2. Know the real deal

If someone called me on the phone and said they were Jeff, I would immediately discern if they were an imposter or not. I know Jeff's voice. I spend a lot of time with Jeff, listening to him. We need to be so familiar with God's word and the voice of His Spirit that we can tell if someone is speaking what is false.

3. Ask the Holy Spirit for discernment

As I said on Day 16, all believers need to walk in discernment. We can leave it to church leadership to judge and remove someone from the church, but we are all responsible for who speaks into our lives. It can be a little confusing if we are trying to do it on our own because we are all being sanctified. Even the best of us still sin. I

have certainly operated in jealousy or selfish ambition. That doesn't mean I am a false teacher because I am continually repenting of those acts of the flesh that the Holy Spirit or a loving brother or sister points out to me. If you are unsure or uncomfortable with someone, ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment.

#### 4. Focus on the foundation

Scripture, prayer, praise and worship are our foundation. Many people are scared of Matthew 7:23. I promise you, if you are spending time daily reading your Bible, praising and worshipping our God and praying, Jesus will never tell you that He doesn't know you.

### Questions for Reflection

1. Has Matthew 7:23 ever struck fear into your heart? Have you ever thought, "what if Jesus says that to me?" What I love about this verse is that Jesus keeps it simple. As long as Jesus knows you, you're good. Jesus explicitly says that you don't have to perform or do a bunch of great things in front of other people. He just wants to know you. If you wanted someone to get to know you, what are the steps you would take? How can you take those same steps with Jesus?
2. It's devastating and heart breaking when we hear of Church leaders being exposed as false. Instead of a question for reflection, I want to encourage you with the knowledge that the staff and elders of Mosaic are passionate, humble followers of Jesus who bear good fruit. Don't take my word for it. Get to know us. None of us are aloof in any way. Take some time to pray for the protection of the leaders and people of Mosaic. Ask the Lord to quickly expose any false teachers who would try to spread deception or division in our church.

## Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

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## Day 20

**Matthew 7:24-29** <sup>24</sup> “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. <sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup> But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

<sup>28</sup> When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, <sup>29</sup> because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Now Jesus closes His great sermon with a picture of those who hear what He says and take the steps to obey, contrasted by those who hear but don't obey His words. As we've talked about a few times, some of the words of Jesus are hard. It's much easier to start building a house on sand. I don't have to work to level out hard rock. But, what I build on sand won't withstand any type of pressure.

A few years ago, Jeff and I visited Pompeii. It was fascinating to walk down ancient Roman streets, go into ancient Roman buildings and see the artwork and mosaics still intact. This ancient city is so well preserved because it was covered in lava and ash when Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79AD. I read an article this morning that archeologists have uncovered the largest and most magnificent home they have ever seen in Pompeii. It has 3 different pools inside the house. They discovered a broiler room where pipes would pump hot water into the first hot pool. The next room had a warm water pool. Finally, the last and biggest room had a cold-water pool big enough to fit 30 people. Whoever owned this home was rich and influential.

In one small inner room, they found 2 skeletons of a man and woman. As the volcano started erupting, they must have hidden themselves in this room, thinking they would be safe in this expensive house they had built. The female skeleton was found clutching jewelry and gold coins. All her wealth couldn't save her from the fury of ash and lava raining down on the city.

Most of us probably won't die in such a dramatic way, but we will all leave this earthly life someday. We are given maybe 80-100 years here. That's nothing compared to eternity. We can spend those years building up as much as we can get here. Or, we can spend those years obeying Jesus and building our lives on the

foundation of His words. Because, the truth is, volcanos erupt, earthquakes happen, fires break out, we lose our jobs, people betray us, we get painful illnesses along with a slew of other storms. If our lives are built on the words of Jesus, we will have an unshakable life that clutching gold coins and jewelry can't bring us.

**James 1:21-25** <sup>21</sup> Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

<sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

James tells us that we must look intently into the word of God. We don't just take a quick glance and walk away. We take a long, hard look. We let the mirror of scripture show us what we really look like. That is what I have tried to help all of us do during our 21 Days of Dwelling. I know that, as I've looked intently, I've seen some things that need some fixing. That's a good thing. When I allow the Holy Spirit to show me what needs fixing through His word, I am blessed.

**Hebrews 12:4-8** <sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup> And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

“My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,  
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,  
<sup>6</sup> because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? <sup>8</sup> If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.

As we let the word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, change us, grow us, correct us and conform us into the image of Christ we become something supernatural. We become a unified body of believers who walk in humility, holiness, love, power and wisdom. We drive back darkness. We show people a better way of living. We give freely. We know our Savior and He knows us. We make a difference for eternity. We don't have to worry about anything. We receive in prayer because we know how to

hear the voice of the Spirit. We have discernment. And, just like the early church, we turn our known world upside-down.

**Acts 17:6 <sup>6</sup> And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.”**

Let’s take the baton passed to us by our brothers and sisters who have gone before us, building our lives on the rock of scripture and turn the 21<sup>st</sup> century upside-down.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. How do the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:24-29 enable you to handle the storms of life with strength and confidence?
2. As we have studied The Sermon on the Mount and looked into it intently, what have you seen in yourself? Have you viewed the conviction of the Holy Spirit as the loving discipline of your Father? How does this point of view help encourage you when you see things in your life that need to change?

## Now Let's SOAP

What **SCRIPTURE** stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you **OBSERVE** about that scripture?

How can you practically **APPLY** this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a **PRAYER** asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.



## **Day 21**

### **Psalm 122:1**

**I was glad when they said to me,  
“Let us go to the house of the Lord!”**

How it must delight the Lord when His children gather to worship Him and love each other! We get to do it twice today. We will see you at church at 10:00am and then back tonight for our Prayer and Worship Night at 6:30. We will be praising the Lord together and giving opportunities to share what God has been doing in your life these last 21 days.

### **What about Day 22?**

As our study of The Sermon on the Mount ends, some of you may be wondering what to study now. Here are a few suggestions to continue your reading of God’s word.

#### **The Gospel of John**

John tells us the story of Jesus with an emphasis on His great love for us.

#### **The Book of James**

James is a book that gives practical ways of living out our Christian faith.

#### **The Book of Philippians**

Philippians encourages us to have joy even in tough circumstances.

#### **The Book of Acts**

Also known as “Acts of the Apostles,” Act gives us a look into the history of the early church.