

STUDY NOTES FOR SERMON OR TEACHING

What does your church or group do for someone after they commit their heart to Jesus?

Tomorrow & the Days to Come was written as a guide to walk someone, individually or with a group of friends, during their first steps of faith. This devotional can be beneficial stand-alone, but there is something powerful about exploring your first steps of faith in the context of community.

During my time as the lead pastor at Center City Church in Charlotte, NC, we gave copies of an early version of this devotional to our entire church family. We walked through it together as a community and prepared ourselves to walk with friends, family, and neighbors when they chose to follow Jesus. I preached a message on the Beatitudes the day we handed them out and encouraged our congregation to prepare themselves to walk alongside new believers.

I have included an outline of study notes, Scriptures, and thoughts that you can use to develop your own sermon or teaching outline for groups as you prepare your next steps after someone in your community commits their heart to Jesus.

TOMORROW AND THE DAYS TO COME

**Matthew 5:1-16 *Matthew 22:35-40 *1 Peter 1:22-2:3 *Ephesians 6:12*

Matthew 5:1-16

- **Location:** Oftentimes, Jesus would stop in picturesque places, climb a hill so that people could see Him, and begin to teach. This is one of those moments.
- "...the reason Jesus went up on a mountain is clear: he wanted to teach them about higher things." - Augustine
- Audience: the disciples (the ones following him closely on his travels)
- Jesus taught them as a group - in community
- A group of imperfect people on different parts of their journey of faith. Just like us.
- Objective: Jesus was proclaiming his kingdom. A new kingdom.
- Jesus was always proclaiming his kingdom. The **value of this kingdom would be counter cultural**. Humility, poverty, service, mourning, generosity- these become the highest of the kingdom values.
- The upside down kingdom is evident in the teaching of Jesus... love and pray for your enemies, the first shall be last, the greatest among you will be a servant to all.
- ***Matthew 22:35-40***- The Greatest Commandment
 - "If this is the greatest commandment, then the Beatitudes get to the root of how we do that." -Tim Mackie

- o “Jesus is not prescribing how to be blessed, but rather describing who is blessed. While the world says the strong, powerful, and happy are ‘well off’, Jesus turns our expectations upside down by saying it's the weak, sad, and overlooked who are well off in God's kingdom.” - Skye Jethani

- ***Understanding the Beatitudes***

- o **The first four** Beatitudes are inward- your personal relationship with Jesus, your reliance on him.
 - “There is a strength, a power even, in understanding brokenness, because embracing our brokenness creates a need and desire for mercy, and perhaps a corresponding need to show mercy. When you experience mercy, you learn things that are hard to learn otherwise. You see things you can't otherwise see; you hear things you can't otherwise hear. You begin to recognize the humanity that resides in each of us.”- Bryan Stevenson, Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption
- o Giving away your selfish ambition, aims, and self-reliance allows you to live in a present reality of the kingdom of God. You can more easily recognize it when you see it.
- o **The second four** Beatitudes show how you live that relationship with Jesus out in the world.
- If you just look at the promises in the Beatitudes, they look great. We all want that. We don't often want to give up the control and do what we need to be meek, and poor in spirit, and peacemakers. It requires giving up our control and trusting Jesus.
- *There are promises for right now and promises for the future.*
 - o “Theirs **is** the kingdom of heaven.” That's present tense. This is mentioned twice as it sandwiches the rest of the Beatitudes. The kingdom of God is experienced here on earth now by *the poor in spirit*, and *the persecuted*.
 - o The other six blessings are future blessings. “.. *will be comforted, will inherit the earth, will be filled, will obtain mercy, will see God, will be called sons of God.*”
 - The encouragement here is that even though none of these things sound exciting to have to deal with now, the implication is that the hardships are only for a season and that blessing comes on the other side.

- “The happiness described in the Beatitudes is a stable happiness not easily unsettled or taken away.” - St Thomas Aquinas
- **1 Peter 1:22-2:3-** Jesus’ kingdom is not meant to be stagnant! We should always be moving toward growth, health, and life.
 - Jesus taught in the context of community. To be salt and light in this world, we also need to live out our faith learning, and growing in community.
 - John 13:35

- *The Bookmark Prayer of St. Teresa of Avila*

Let nothing disturb you
 Let nothing frighten you.
 All things are passing away.
 God never changes.
 Patience obtains all things.
 Whoever has God lacks nothing;
 God alone suffices.