

STAY SALTY

Matthew 5-7

Gympie Presbyterian Church

Growth Group Studies

Welcome to Growth Groups for 2024

Matthew 5-7 records what is often called Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*. It contains many well-known sayings and images: the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, salt losing its saltiness, building a house on a rock. It also contains challenging instruction from the mouth of Jesus about righteousness. Because of this, the *Sermon* has been approached from different directions by Christians—is it a standard that's too high to keep, designed to show our sinfulness and our desperate need for God's grace? Is Jesus taking the role of the last Old Testament prophet so this teaching is only for Israel? Is it a manual for Christian discipleship—is Jesus teaching his followers throughout the ages how to *stay salty*?

How to get the most out of Growth Groups

As we meet together in Growth Groups our goal is to *grow* in Christ—to *grow* in our knowledge of God, our love for one another, and our passion and ability to reach our region with the gospel.

Central to Growth Groups is God's Word because God grows his people through his Word. God is also at work through one another, as we share our lives, encourage each other, and pray for each other.

So how can you get the most out of Growth Groups?

1. Be praying for your Growth Group. Pray for other members, pray for the group times, that God would be working to grow us in Christian maturity.
2. Read the Bible passage before the group meets. Some weeks we'll be reading quite a bit from Acts, so it may help to familiarise yourself with the general outline of the passage before the group meets.
3. Get into the discussion by asking questions. A key part of how we dig into God's Word together is through discussion—and asking questions is the best way to get the discussion going. That's why our study booklets are mainly questions...they're a tool to help us dig! And it's good to remember there are no silly or wrong questions—if it's something you're wondering about, someone else is probably wondering the same thing (or they'd love to work with you to find the answer).
4. Beware of study notes. Study Bibles are great resources—they have tools like maps, indexes, timelines, and diagrams that can help summarise and illustrate parts of the Bible. But sometimes in Growth Groups, Study Bible notes can prevent us from digging into God's Word. They take the discussion away from looking closely at God's Word and away from engaging with and encouraging one another. They can be a good tool—but only if handled with care!
5. Share what God's doing in your life. Things that are encouraging and you want to thank God for, things that are concerning and you need supportive prayer.

If you've been part of a small group before, I'm sure you can think of other things too! And we'll do this during our first meeting.

Credits

These studies have been developed with assistance from material from Burdekin Presbyterian Churches.

Images are credited as they appear.

Starting Well

Week 1

To Get Started

What have been some good experiences you've had in Growth Groups (or small groups, whatever they're called) in the past?

What have been some bad experiences?

This week we're going to set some goals and guidelines for our Growth Group. Since God's Word is central to our group, we're going to look at a few passages about why studying the Bible is important.

Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17

1. Why does Paul remind Timothy of his example? How has God used examples to grow you spiritually?
2. What does Paul encourage Timothy to do? What part does the Bible play in this?
3. What four things does the Bible do? How should this shape our goals and expectations for Growth Group?
4. What is the ultimate goal of God's Word? What things stop us from achieving this goal in Growth Groups? What things help us achieve this goal?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

5. In this letter, Paul shows his commitment to proclaiming the gospel. What else did Paul share with the Thessalonians (see verse 8)? What do you think this means?

6. What do both 1 Thessalonians and 2 Timothy show us of the values of Christian communities? How can we embody these values in our Growth Group?

Bringing it together

7. What do you want to get out of Growth Group this year?

8. What are some practical things that will help us achieve this?

Finish by praying in the light of 2 Timothy 3 and 1 Thessalonians 2 for each other, our group this year, and our church family.



The Values of Jesus

Matthew 5:1-16

To get things started

When have you felt blessed? Who is someone you think has been blessed?

Read Matthew 5:1-16

Although there's a large crowd around them, verse 1 tells us Jesus is mainly speaking to his disciples. And Jesus begins by giving 8 short statements of *congratulations* (they're sometimes called the *Beatitudes*, from the Latin word for *blessed*.)¹

1. Jesus says his followers have different values from the world. What might be some of the values people in our region might think are *beatitudes* (values that are worthy of congratulations)? Write a few down.
2. Some translations say *happy* instead of *blessed*. How is this different? Are blessed people always happy?
3. The promises of each beatitude is almost always future. Why do you think this is? How is Jesus the fulfilment of the promises?

The first four beatitudes (vv3-6) could be grouped as 'how we are to see ourselves before God.'

4. What does it mean to be *poor in spirit* (see Isaiah 57:15; 66:1-2; 1 Peter 5:5-7)
5. What does it mean to be meek? (Jesus uses the same word of himself in Matthew 11:29. See also 2 Corinthians 10:1)

¹ The word *blessed* appears 9 times, but verse 11 is generally thought to be an expansion of verse 10 rather than a separate beatitude.

The second four beatitudes (vv7-10) could be grouped as ‘how we are to act towards people.’

6. What does it mean to be pure in heart? (See 2 Timothy 2:22, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 John 3:2-3)

7. ‘Congratulations to the persecuted’. What should our attitude be to opposition and persecution? (See also 1 Peter 4:12-19)

Read Matthew 5:13-16 again

8. In this section, Jesus uses three pictures to describe his disciples. What are the three pictures and what is similar between the three?

9. How might we, as followers of Jesus, lose our saltiness (or taste) or hide our light/city?

10. What is the goal of staying salty, shiny, and up-on-a-hilly?

A Curly Question

Jesus calls his disciples to have values that are very different from the rest of humanity. How different are we? Are we prepared to be different? How can we encourage each other to ‘stay salty’?

Jesus vs the Law?

Matthew 5:17-48

To get things started

Most Australians think of themselves as pretty good, decent, moral people. Are they right? If not, why?

In our last study, we heard the world-changing values of Jesus—what it really means to be blessed. Now Jesus takes the law of Moses and shows how he ‘fulfils’ it and how it’s applied in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Read Matthew 5:17-48

It seems Jesus’ teaching has been misunderstood or misquoted—‘do not think that I have come...’—but Jesus now sets the record straight.

1. ‘I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.’ Some people have taken Jesus as teaching a ‘clean break’ from the Jewish laws, while others think nothing has changed. What is the danger in both views?
2. Jesus holds the Old Testament in high regard. How do you think he *fulfils* the law? (5:17)
3. How does Jesus say our response to his commandments determines our status in the Kingdom? (5:19)
4. How could our righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees?
5. Jesus gives six examples of how the Law of Moses is applied in his kingdom. In the table below, summarise what ‘you have heard’ and what ‘Jesus says to you’.

You have heard...	But I say to you...

6. Which of Jesus' commands most challenges you right now?

7. Jesus summarises his commands 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (5:48). Jesus is calling his followers to a different (and higher) standard than the world (5:47). Is Jesus serious? How can we ever do this?

Close in prayer

Listening to Jesus' teaching is confronting—there are probably things you need to confess and repent. Take time as a group to pray (you might want to spend a few minutes in silent prayer). Close by turning Matthew 5:6 into a prayer.

Righteousness Jesus' Way

Matthew 6:1-18

To get started

Why do you think religious people (especially leaders) are portrayed negatively in TV and movies? (Maybe you can think of a particularly bad...or good...example.)

Read Matthew 6:1-18

1. Jesus warns us about doing 'righteousness in front of others' (6:1) yet he also called his followers to be the 'salt of the earth' and to 'let your light shine' so people might **see** our good deeds (5:13, 16). Is this a contradiction? What does Jesus want his followers to do? What is he warning us of?
2. Jesus talks about receiving two different kinds of rewards (6:2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18). How are these two types of rewards different? How should believers be motivated by promised rewards?

Giving

3. Jesus warns about giving in front of an audience. How are we tempted to do this kind of 'righteousness'?
4. Part of Jesus' solution is for the left hand to be ignorant of the right hand's action. Is this possible? What is Jesus' point?

Prayer (and fasting)

5. Jesus is not impressed by *performance prayer*. According to him, what are some of the features of this kind of prayer?
6. Have you been guilty of performance prayer? When?

7. Jesus teaches the 'Lord's Prayer' as a solution to performance prayer. How does it help us? How is it a model prayer?

8. How might even the 'Lord's Prayer' become a performance?

9. Jesus then goes on to talk of fasting, assuming it will be something his followers do.² What does Jesus say about fasting?

Bringing it together

In this section, Jesus is giving examples of ways our 'righteousness' can be about pleasing people rather than God.

10. In what ways are you tempted to seek the approval of people rather than God?

11. How can Jesus' teaching give us right motives as we live?



² Although there are no fasts commanded in the Law of Moses, fasting appears to be part of repentance and lament in the Old Testament, e.g. 1 Samuel 7:6, Isaiah 58:3.

Jesus and our Hearts

Matthew 6:19-34

To Get Started

Write down the first five things that come to mind when asked ‘what are you concerned or worried about’. Share with the group those you feel comfortable sharing. Do you notice any commonalities or patterns?

After addressing some potentially hypocritical religious practices (giving, prayer, and fasting) Jesus now gets to the heart of things—our deepest desires and concerns.

Read Matthew 6:19-34

Lasting Treasure

1. Jesus wants us to store up treasure in heaven (6:19-21). Why is the alternative foolish?
2. Our hearts are found where our treasure is. Where is your treasure (or what do you treasure)? How do your actions (for example, how you spend money) reveal your heart?
3. Jesus wants us to fix our eyes on him alone (6:22-23).³ Why is the alternative foolish?
4. Why is it impossible to serve two masters (6:24). Have you tried?

Lasting Peace

Having addressed our divided hearts, Jesus turns to talk to our anxious hearts.

5. According to Jesus, what things cause worry (6:25)? Are there other things you worry about?

³ The word translated ‘good’ (as in ‘good eyes’) most likely refers to having a ‘singular purpose’.

6. Four times we're told to *not worry*. Fill out the table below with the reasons Jesus gives.

Verse	Reason to not worry
25	
27	
30	
34	

7. Do people today 'run after all these things' (v32)? How do you see it in our society? How do you see it in yourself?

8. How does having Jesus' priorities (v33) help with anxiety? How can followers of Jesus 'stay salty' with our priorities?

A Curly Question

Jesus tells his followers to not worry. Paul writes that believers should not be anxious but cast everything on God in prayer (Philippians 4:6). However, Paul also says it's good for Christians (church members) to be *concerned* for each other (1 Corinthians 12:25) and affirms Timothy for his *concern* for him (Philippians 2:20) (the *concern* and *worry/anxiety* is the same in the original language). So which is it? Should Christians be concerned or not?

Relating Jesus' Way

Matthew 7:1-12

To Get Started

How does it feel to be 'judged' by other people? Can you think of a time you felt (unfairly) judged?

Read Matthew 7:1-12

1. Why does Jesus tell his followers to not judge others? (7:1-2)
2. According to verses 3-4, why are we often unfit to judge others?
3. Sometimes we think our 'judging' is actually helping. What steps does Jesus say we have to take to truly help (7:5)?
4. What is your current 'plank'?
5. Jesus uses some strong words in verse 6. What kinds of people do you think Jesus refers to as *dogs* and *pigs*? What do you think the 'sacred' or 'pearls' things refer to?
6. Have you ever had to put the warning of verse 6 into practice?

The start of chapter 7 talks about relationships with other people. Godly relationships are based on our relationship with God.

7. What encouragement does Jesus give those who ask, seek, and knock (7:7-8)?

8. Jesus backs up this encouragement with a short parable. What does this parable say about human nature (both positive and negative)? What does Jesus teach about God through this parable?

9. Confucius is recorded as saying, 'Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.'⁴ How does Jesus' teaching in verse 12 go beyond this?

10. In what sense does *doing unto others* sum up the Law and Prophets?

11. Think of a currently difficult relationship. How could Jesus' teaching help mend this relationship?



Photo by Monstera Production

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucius#Ethics>. This is sometimes called the 'silver rule'.

Jesus and Deception

Matthew 7:13-20

To Get Started

Why do you think people follow popular leaders or celebrities?

Read Matthew 7:13-20

1. Jesus pictures two ways to live: the wide way and the narrow way. Why do you think Jesus says following him is the *narrow* way?
2. Jesus' picture makes it clear there's only one way to life. Do you think this idea is popular today? Why or why not?
3. Jesus continues his picture of the wide and narrow ways with a warning about false prophets. How are these two ideas connected?
4. Jesus says false prophets are like ferocious wolves that can be known by their fruit. How are they like wolves? What kind of 'fruit' might they produce?
5. Jesus says false prophets 'come to you in sheep's clothing'. What disguises might they wear today?
6. Jesus' warning about false prophets is serious, but how can we keep ourselves from going overboard and becoming 'witch hunters' in seeking to discern false prophets? (It might be helpful to consider Matthew 7:1-5.)

7. Jesus warns that every tree that does not produce 'good fruit' will be 'cut down and thrown into the fire'. How does this warning help us from becoming complacent?

A Curly Question

John sees an uncountable multitude gathered around the heavenly throne, praising God and the Lamb (Revelation 4:9). But Jesus says only a few enter the narrow gate. Who's right, Jesus or John (or both)?



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Doing Jesus' Words

Matthew 7:21-29

To Get Started

Have you ever had a building project fail spectacularly?

Read Matthew 7:21-29

1. What might we find admirable in the people described in verses 21-23? Despite this, why does Jesus condemn them?
2. Jesus finishes with a parable of two builders. How are the builders' houses similar and different?
3. The coming of storms reveals the difference between the two houses. What kind of 'storms' might we face in life? How do they reveal what we've built our lives upon?
4. As Jesus finishes speaking we hear the reflection of the crowds (7:28-29). Think back over the whole sermon, how does Jesus' teaching reveal his unique authority? What does this mean for how we should respond to Jesus?
5. What are some of the teachings of Jesus that have most challenged you? Have you started putting them into practice?

A Curly Question

We normally think of reading the Bible as being beneficial. How might reading the Bible be dangerous?

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