

# Sermon on the Mount

## Principles of Love-Centered Righteousness

So far in our journey through the Sermon on the Mount, we've learned and reflected on characteristics disciples share and the impact living these have on the world around us. We've gained a deeper understanding of how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament law and how that law can transform our hearts and deepen our discipleship.

We now transition into what appears to be a hands-on guide to discipleship living – a “Discipleship for Dummies”. The rest of the Sermon compares the scribes and Pharisees’ teaching of the law to Jesus’ teaching of the same law. It is tempting for us to think, “if we just follow these specific rules, we will be doing exactly what Jesus wants us to do.” In reality, Jesus is using these examples to give us an approach to life - not one with clear, black and white rules but, rather, one based on principles or virtues that should influence *all* of our actions and decisions. Jesus is saying in effect: “Look, I am illustrating *this* kind of life. It means *this* type of behavior.”

We will explore these passages in the upcoming weeks. As we do, let's keep in mind Jesus' central principles and remember that His chief desire was always to show the true meaning and intent of the law. So what are these central principles? They are:

- The spirit of the law matters, not just the literal interpretation of the law.
- The law must never be regarded as something we just have to obey. Remember, as we explored in last week's reflection, Jesus doesn't want mere obedience, He wants a transformation of our heart. The purpose of the law is to nurture our relationship with God and help us grow as disciples.
- We are to conform to the law, not only with our actions, but also in our thoughts, motives, and desires. God is concerned as much with what leads to the action as the action itself. As such, the purity of a person's heart matters.
- The law is intended to lead us positively. More than merely avoiding all that is sinful, the law should move us to hunger and thirst for what is right and good.

Ignatius of Loyola has given us a wonderful tool for helping us reflect on how we are doing in this regard. *The Examen* is a brief, four-step exercise that walks us through our day and invites us to examine our thoughts, motives, words, and actions through the lens of compassion and love.

- We begin with opening our hearts to the presence of God, then review our day with gratitude looking for the gifts and blessedness received and offer a prayer of thanks.
- We then review our day offering compassion and forgiveness for those times when we felt challenged, fearful, or perhaps didn't respond to something in the best way.
- We offer a prayer for help to grow more into love.
- Finally, we speak to God about our day, our needs and desires for the coming day, or whatever is on our mind, then we quietly listen for God's response.
- *The Examen* can be closed with the Our Father or something similar.

Now that we have our foundation, let's continue exploring the Sermon on the Mount.

*Reflection Question:* What are the principles and virtues that I follow that influence my decisions and actions?

Closing Prayer

Speak to Jesus about what is on your heart, then rest in silence for a few moments listening for His response.