

Discussion Guide on Matthew 5:38-48

The following is a suggested discussion guide for you to use with your family, small group, or Sunday Morning Bible Study as we walk through the Sermon on the Mount.

Introduction

Begin with an opening icebreaker question of your choice. Be sure to share prayer requests and pray together before or after the lesson.

Video

Watch the video for our session on the Sermon on the Mount (www.mbbc.org/home-church).

Discussion

In this week's passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continues to use hyperbolic language ("big language to make a big point") as He helps us understand the true meaning of the law, by continuing this pattern of "You have heard it said, but I say ...," helping us go from a "bare minimum" faith to a deeper understanding of what we can do for the cause of Christ.

First, have a volunteer read Matthew 5:38-42. Have a volunteer read the verses, and then use the questions Ben gave last week as an outline to discuss the passage.

1. What is the law being presented here?

You have heard it said, "Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" (from the law God gave to Moses, found in Exodus 21:24 and Leviticus 24:20). This law was intended for Israel's judges; the people would take their disputes to the court of law, where Israel's judges would try the cases using this principle.

2. How is the law being interpreted?

Even though this was a law meant for judges, many interpreted it to mean that they could take the law into their own hands; in other words, if you do something to me, I am permitted to do likewise to you in retaliation.

3. How does Jesus transform our understanding of this law?

Jesus tells them that, even though they have heard it said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," they should not resist an evil person. Then, He gives several scenarios for what an evil person might do to us:

- If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. Here Jesus is taking a different approach to speak hyperbolically about those who insult us. If someone "slaps you on the right cheek" by insulting you, let them insult you again, because your identity is not tied up in what others think about you but in the kingdom of the Lord.
 - **Ask, "Where do you find this principle challenging – not to fight back evil with evil but to trust justice is in God's hands and not to retaliate? At home? At work? In traffic? With friends?"** (Note: Jesus isn't condoning verbal abuse here, but what He is saying is that, in instances where someone does insult us, we have an opportunity to not fight back and not retaliate with our natural selves, but to show the kingdom way.)

- If someone sues you and takes your tunic, let him have your cloak also (a tunic is a loose sleeveless garment reaching the knees, and cloak is an outer garment hanging loosely from the shoulders). If someone takes your shirt, give them your coat too. What is Jesus saying – wouldn't that render us naked? No – but Jesus is using this overstatement to make the point that if we have wronged someone, we should yield more than is required to repay them, giving them both our figurative tunic and cloak.
- If someone tells you to go one mile, go with him two. Jesus makes this statement in reference to Roman soldiers, who could command anyone at any time to go one mile with them, carrying their gear. Jesus says, "Don't let this get to you, but seize the opportunity to show the better way." We often want to do the bare minimum, but Jesus calls us to a deeper level of commitment, showing our love for Christ in every area.
 - **Ask, "Where do you find this principle hard to apply? At home? At work? In friendships? With our families? How do we seize the opportunity to practically live out the gospel, to go beyond what is asked of us and to give generously?"**

Next, have a volunteer read Matthew 5:43-48. Use the same questions as a guide to discuss the passage.

1. What is the law being presented here?

To love your neighbor – interestingly enough, the command to "love your neighbor but hate your enemy" isn't found in Scripture.

2. How is the law being interpreted?

First, since part of this command ("hate your enemy") is not found in Scripture, this is a sign that so often we conform the Bible to what we think it ought to say. The Jews were okay with loving their neighbors (other Jews) but not with loving their enemies (Gentiles).

3. How does Jesus transform our understanding of the law?

Jesus takes it up 100 notches by telling His audience to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. Why? Jesus calls us to love in this way "so that we will be sons of our Father in heaven."

Ask, "How do we see God love people in this way?" (Example from Romans 5 and from the cross – Jesus was persecuted and mocked for our sakes)

- Who is such an enemy that you think they could never come to faith? Keep praying for them and believing that even such an enemy could become a follower of Christ. As we pray for these people, we must remember that we too were once enemies of God – and that God has forgiven us of our sins, so we must ask Him to help us to forgive those who sin against us (the Lord's Prayer).

Close by highlighting some of Mary's application points:

Are there places in life where you are seeking retaliation? Are you overly frustrated when people require more of you than you think they should? Have you allowed your natural inclination to love people who are like you to overcome you, and to lead you to hate those who stand in the way of your joy and life? Are there relationships where love and prayer seem to be the last thing you want to do for someone? Bring those to the Lord, acknowledging that we need His help! Jesus isn't asking us to do anything He isn't willing to do Himself – He was mocked, insulted, retaliated against, and yet He went to the cross, to the joy set before him. What cross are you willing to bear this week for the sake of the gospel?