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A Bible Reading Plan for The Sermon on the Mount





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Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church body would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word.

This reading plan compliments a five-week sermon series our Senior Minister, Dr. Doug Dortch, will be preaching on the subject of discipleship. The plan will guide you through Matthew 5-7, which contains a block of Jesus' teaching that we commonly refer to as, "The Sermon on the Mount." The guide will provide you with a suggested Scripture reading and devotional thought for each day of the week. On the weekends, we suggest that you re-read the Scripture passages that you have been working through during the past week. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit [www.mbbc.org/project119](http://www.mbbc.org/project119).



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**Week One: Matthew 5:1-26**  
**October 5 - 11, 2015 | Dr. Doug Dortch**

**Monday, October 5 | Matthew 5:1-6**

One of the great debates surrounding Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is whether he intended for the masses or for his disciples only. I tend to favor the latter argument, specifically in light of how the text tells us that though "he saw the crowds," it was his disciples who "came to him." The entire teaching is built around Jesus' invitation to have his followers conduct their affairs by an entirely different set of standards. One that would enable them to have standing in the Kingdom of Heaven, the realm of God's rule where His will is always done and His purposes always brought to pass. As you read these first verses, notice how the blessing flows to the poor, the mournful, the meek and the desperate. These persons best know their need for what only God can bring about, and therefore are in a place where such blessings become a part of everyday life. Be willing to go against the flow of our prevailing culture in these ways, and you too will know a depth of blessing that too few will ever come to know.

**Tuesday, October 6 | Matthew 5:7-12**

With this second section of the Beatitudes, Jesus' instruction on how to find deep blessing in everyday life, he points us in the direction of moving beyond our needs to advance God's Kingdom purposes in the lives of those around us. Whereas the first part addresses our desperation, this part deals with how we take the blessings that come from our dependence upon God and employ them in extending God's reign in all the places where God calls us. As Jesus reminds us, such a focus will rarely be popular because the world in which we live is wired completely different. But if righteousness is our ultimate goal, then we can do nothing less than always give ourselves to the right things for the right reasons and trust God with the results.

**Wednesday, October 7 | Matthew 5:13-16**

As Jesus moves into the application of his Beatitudes, he asks us to consider the difference we make for God's Kingdom purposes in our world. As the last of the Beatitudes reminds us, being committed to such a life is rarely popular, but now Jesus shows us that doing so is the only way we will be able to turn our world around for the better. The whole purpose of our salvation is to represent God's power in a life that is wholeheartedly open to Him. How might you represent such power and what difference are you making for Christ in your world?



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**Week One: Matthew 5:1-26**  
**October 5 - 11, 2015 | Dr. Doug Dortch**

**Thursday, October 8 | Matthew 5:17-20**

Many have the misconception that Jesus was “anti-Law.” But when you read the Sermon on the Mount, you see clearly that Jesus only intended to give additional substance to the spirit of what God gave through Moses at Sinai. Indeed, one interpretation of Matthew’s account of the Jesus story is that Jesus functions as a “New Moses,” with the Sermon on the Mount functioning as a continuation of God’s revelation, not a substitute. As you read this part of Jesus’ Sermon, ask yourself how you are doing in maintaining faithfulness to God’s direction. Are you taking full advantage of the opportunities God gives you to show your devotion in all that you say and do? That is what Jesus means when he speaks of a righteousness that “surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law.”

**Friday, October 9 | Matthew 5:21-26**

This section of the Sermon on the Mount begins with what has been called “the 6 Antitheses.” These teachings intensify God’s expectations of His people and show us what that “surpassing righteousness” looks like in everyday life. While none of us would think himself to be a murderer, Jesus does not allow us to pat ourselves on the back as he reminds us that anytime we are at odds with a brother or sister, we are not in the center of God’s will. It is the responsibility of the more mature Christian to initiate efforts at reconciliation, as drastically and as quickly as necessary. Who might you need to approach this week? Your willingness to do so will not only extend grace in that person’s direction, but will also mean even more mercy in your life as you experience God’s release from your bitterness and your anger and have it replaced by His surpassing peace and joy.

**Saturday, October 10 - Sunday, October 11 | Matthew 5:1-26**

This weekend read back over Matthew 5:1-26 and reflect on what God has been teaching you this week.



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## Week Two: Matthew 5:27-6:4 October 12-18, 2015 | Wayne Splawn

### Monday, October 12 | Matthew 5:27-32

Sin is destructive and should be avoided at all costs. Jesus clearly teaches this truth in Matthew 5:29-30. In between teachings on adultery and divorce, Jesus uses hyperbolic language to show how radical we should be in our attempts to fight sin. He certainly does not intend for us to mutilate our bodies, but he does want us to recognize the importance of avoiding anything that would tempt us to sin against God.

Spend some time reflecting on this truth today. What are the things in your life that tempt you to sin that you need to avoid? Ask God to clearly reveal these things to you and to empower you to say “no” to anything that would cause you to stumble. It may be helpful to tell a close Christian friend about the things you know you need to avoid in your pursuit of knowing and living for Christ. Then that friend can pray for you and encourage you as you seek to grow in faithfulness to the Lord.

### Tuesday, October 13 | Matthew 5:33-37

You have probably made a promise to someone at some point in your life. Why do we make promises? A promise is supposed to assure the other person that we really intend to follow through on the commitment we are making.

In Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus teaches his followers to avoid taking oaths in order to assure others of their trustworthiness. Rather than making such oaths, Jesus instructs his disciples to be people of integrity who simply say “yes” or “no” when communicating their intentions to others. As you think about your own life, consider the importance of being a person of integrity. Think before you make commitments to others and consider whether or not you will be able to follow through on what you have said you would do. As followers of Christ, we want to strive to be people who others can trust.

### Wednesday, October 14 | Matthew 5:38-42

Think about a time when someone wronged you. What emotions do you feel when you think about this episode in your life? Most of us would have to admit one thing that comes to mind is the desire for revenge. Our natural inclination when someone wrongs us is to try and get even. We want the other person to pay for what they have done to us.

Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:38-42 that his followers must resist the temptation to retaliate. In Exodus 21:24 and Leviticus 24:20, we read the command that Jesus mentions in verse 38 which reads, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” This command was given to prevent people from seeking excessive punishments against those who had wronged them. That is, punishments needed to be consistent with the nature of the offense. However, it seems people in Jesus’ day had turned this command into a license to get even. Jesus turns this thought on its head by commanding his disciples to seek the good of those who have wronged them. (continued on next page)



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## Week Two: Matthew 5:27-6:4 October 12-18, 2015 | Wayne Splawn

(continued from previous page) Our temptation with verses like these is to get bogged down with how we should respond in hypothetical scenarios or engage in debates about pacifism. However, to do so would be to miss the point Jesus is making, namely that his followers should respond in surprising ways to those who have wronged them. Rather than trying to get even or seeking retribution, we are to return wrongdoing with blessing. Such a response would be a powerful witness to the grace and mercy we have received through faith in Jesus Christ.

### Thursday, October 15 | Matthew 5:43-48

Scientific study has done a lot to explain why our universe operates the way it does. For example, the law of gravity explains why an apple falls to the earth when dropped from a tree. However, from time to time scientists discover anomalies in our world. That is, there are certain things that do not behave in the way one would expect given what we know to be true about the world. Oftentimes scientists make great discoveries when they give their attention to studying things that challenge our commonly held beliefs.

In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus teaches his followers to be anomalies in the world. That is, they are to challenge commonly held beliefs by living in a way that is different from most of the people in the world. In this instance, Jesus teaches his followers to be different in how they respond to their enemies. If we follow the way of the world, then we will love those who love us and hate our enemies. But Jesus teaches something very different. He commands his disciples to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. Why? Because doing so reflects the character of God who makes the sun rise on the evil and the just and sends rain to the just and unjust alike. When people see Jesus' followers living according to the principles of the Kingdom of God rather than the principles of this world, they will take notice and hopefully be drawn to Christ through our witness.

If we operate according to the principles of this world, then we will struggle to make a difference for Jesus Christ. However, if the Gospel of Jesus Christ causes us to live differently, then people will notice the change that Jesus makes in our lives. This is not something we can accomplish in our own power. Ask God to empower you to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Ask God to transform your heart and life so that you will be able to bear witness to the radical love that God offers to all people through Jesus Christ.



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**Week Two: Matthew 5:27-6:4**  
**October 12-18, 2015 | Wayne Splawn**

**Friday, October 16 | Matthew 6:1-4**

Who does not like to be noticed from time to time? Most of us would agree that we like it when people notice something exceptional in us. Sometimes we are even motivated to do good things in hopes that others will see what we have done and think better of us for our accomplishments.

Jesus cautions us against this tendency in Matthew 6:1-4. He teaches his disciples not to do acts of righteousness in hopes of being seen by others. If this is their motivation for doing good works, then Jesus says they will receive no reward from their Father in heaven.

One of the ways we are tempted to do our works of righteousness in order to receive praise from others is by giving money to the poor. Jesus says that the hypocrites of his day would make a big commotion in the streets when giving to the poor to make sure that everyone took notice of their generosity. His disciples, however, are to be different. They are to give in secret knowing that God will take notice of their giving. What are your motivations for doing good works? Do you secretly hope that others will see your good works and glorify you? Are you content to do the right thing even if no one will ever take notice? Ask God to give you a pure heart that wants to serve the Lord without the intention of being praised by other people.

**Saturday, October 17 - Sunday, October 18 | Matthew 5:27-6:4**

This weekend read Matthew 5:27-6:4 and reflect on what God has been teaching you this week.



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**Week Three: Matthew 6:5-7:6**  
**October 19 - 25, 2015 | Mary Splawn**

**Monday, October 19 | Matthew 6:5-15**

In this passage, Jesus teaches about prayer. There are several things that He warns against in our communication with God. First, He says that our prayers should not be showy (see verse 5). Second, Jesus says we should not view prayer as some kind of lengthy magical incantation with just the right words said in just the right way (see verse 6). Instead, prayer should be meaningful talk to a real and personal God.

Notice the sequence of the Lord's Prayer. It is important to note that the first half of the Lord's Prayer is about God's glory and the second half is about our needs. Often times, we rush into God's presence and forget to savor the important truths that God is personal (our Father), that God is holy and worthy of our honor (hallowed be your name), that God's kingdom purposes are most important (your kingdom come, your will be done).

When we take time to orient ourselves around God and his glory, we can appropriately pray "give us ... forgive us ... [and] deliver us..." This week, consider praying the Lord's Prayer each day. As you pray, think about the meaning of the words and elaborate on each phrase.

For example:

Our Father [Thank you for being a personal God, clearly revealed in Christ]

Who art in heaven [You are real, not an idol ... You are beyond us yet our ever present help]

Hallowed be thy name [You are holy, set apart, merciful, and loving]

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven [Help us to do anything you call us to do to bring about your purposes in this world.]



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**Week Three: Matthew 6:5-7:6**  
**October 19 - 25, 2015 | Mary Splawn**

**Tuesday, October 20 | Matthew 6:16-18**

After teaching about prayer, Jesus moves to the topic of fasting (abstaining from food). Like other spiritual disciplines such as prayer and giving, fasting can be manipulated for personal gain. Yet, when fasting is oriented around the goal of worshipping God, repentance, and devotion to God, it is a meaningful practice that should be part of our spiritual development. Jesus says “when you fast ...” and not “if.”

Fasting helps us shift our focus from food to faith. It gives us an opportunity to say to God, I depend on you to meet my needs. In addition, fasting is associated with repentance and spiritual cleansing.

Interestingly, fasting often reveals the things that control us. When we give something up, we recognize how much we depend on that item for our comfort. Yet, the awareness of our weakness helps to remind us of our deep need for God’s help and grace.

So, what are we waiting for? Pick a day to give up food (while continuing to drink lots of water) and focus the time you would eat on learning about God and communing with God. If you can’t give up food totally because of a medical condition, consider abstaining from something else that has a controlling presence in your life (i.e. television, social media, coffee and other caffeinated drinks) or consider a partial fast.

During the fast, journal your thoughts and feelings and reflect on how your fast is affecting your mood and actions. Ask the Lord to strengthen your faith and to help you understand more clearly his statement “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35).

For more information on fasting, see “The Discipline of Fasting” in Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster. You may access a .pdf copy of Foster’s chapter on fasting here: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/oB\\_z0oCBSJYPYZTNxV3JKSWw4Nzg/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/oB_z0oCBSJYPYZTNxV3JKSWw4Nzg/view?usp=sharing).



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## Week Three: Matthew 6:5-7:6 October 19 - 25, 2015 | Wyatt Harris

### Wednesday, October 21 | Matthew 6:19-24

These words of Jesus are a real challenge for us today. When I read them, I am immediately reminded of our culture's heavy dependence on technology and entertainment. We give lots of attention and effort to making sure our iPhones are updated and squared away, and perhaps we spend lots of emotional energy and invest ourselves heavily in our favorite sports team or school. I am certainly guilty here! When my team loses, or my iPhone freezes up, I get frustrated and even angry sometimes. These are only two examples, but when I sit and reflect on it, it amazes me how much of ourselves we give to gathering "treasures ... on earth, where moth and grub destroys them and where thieves break in and steal" (Matt. 6:19-20).

How true Christ's words are: "The lamp of the body is the eye. Now if your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness" (Matt. 6:22-23). In other words, whatever we do, wherever we place our attention, energy, and emotion, we act with our whole self. Our actions reveal who we are.

Jesus is surely not condemning us having healthy fun and entertainment, but the reality that our actions reveal who we are is made explicit here in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew's Gospel shows that Jesus is all about his Father's kingdom which we as Christians belong to and have promised hope in its reality and coming! May we live in light of this truth. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as in heaven! Amen.

### Thursday, October 22 | Matthew 6:25-34

Reading Matthew's Gospel, one cannot help but notice Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, its immediacy and its promised coming. Here in this famous passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we again are faced with a challenge: do not worry, do not be anxious! "Do not be concerned about your life, what you eat or what you drink, nor about your body, what you put on. Is life not more than food and the body more than clothing?" (Matt. 6:25).

But how anxious and worried we are! We spend lots of time worrying over food and clothing, shelter and possessions. We especially worry over our futures—our personal future, our family's future, the future of our city or nation too!

What stands out to me in so much of Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom is this: the nearness and personal nature of his Father. What a blessing it is that as the people of God, we are permitted to share in addressing Jesus' Father. This text is not about human nature in general but is addressed to a people who know about the Kingdom of the Father and are touched by it. Jesus does not dismiss our anxiety and worry; nor does he expect us to not commit to a life of work for the common good of what we do worry over—our self, our family, our city, our country. (continued on next page)



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### Week Three: Matthew 6:5-7:6

October 19 - 25, 2015 | Wyatt Harris

#### Thursday, October 22 | Matthew 6:25-34

(continued from previous page) But in the midst of our lives, we can hear these words of comfort that the Father is near and he has promised our participation in His Kingdom. So God cares for the animals and lilies of the fields, and his promise says: “how much more you, people of little faith?” (Matt. 6:30). May we be blessed by the Father’s nearness, and pray earnestly for the continued gift of faith, that we might faithfully participate in the coming Kingdom! Amen.

#### Friday, October 23 | Matthew 7:1-6

The exhortations of Jesus here are plain: we are not to judge each other. “Do not judge” (Matt. 7:1). This is truly radical because, upon just a second’s reflection, these few verses define our reality as people perfectly. We judge. We are constantly judging. We cannot help but judge each other. We judge appearances; we judge each other’s actions; we critique each other’s work; we judge our personal selves! The predicament is endless. And our hypocrisy is exposed: “And why do you look at the splinter in your brother’s eye, but you do not notice the beam in your eye?” (Matt. 7:3). I judge the splinter in a fellow, but I do this and do not even want to acknowledge the rather large plank that I’m dragging around. I’m sure we all can relate to this.

These words are certainly straightforward. We ought to heed the command, for we will be judged by our own judgments but again, we cannot “not judge” each other! And, judgment is necessary for our society to function. What about our law courts? Our family rules? Our church polity? Judgment thus is a good thing too. Regardless, judgment rules our reality.

Jesus seems to have put us in a conundrum: we are called to not participate in what we always caught up participating in! Only something so profound and much more radical can fulfill the radicalness of Jesus’ exhortation: Jesus’ move to the cross. Jesus is the judge, for he commands us here, and he will come again to judge all; the Father has given him everything. Yet he is the judged one too. Jesus became the judged one for us in his death on the cross, so that we do not have to ultimately bear the burden of playing judge and god over each other. Jesus knows he is heading to the cross (which is the result of judgment from the high priest and the Roman Pilate!) when he gives us these words in the Sermon on the Mount. He sees our predicament, and he himself is the answer to it. His death as the judged and condemned one is the radical subversion of our cycle of judging.

We know not what we do, and cannot help what we do. May Jesus’ words of forgiveness (Luke 23:34), from the cross of all places, remind us of what he has done for us: he is the judge judged in our place. Thanks be to God. Amen.

#### Saturday, October 24- Sunday, October 25 | Matthew 6:5-7:6

This weekend read Matthew 6:5-7:6 and reflect on what God has been teaching you this week.



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## Week Four : Matthew 7:7-29

October 26 - November 1 | Hayden Walker

### Monday, October 26 | Matthew 7:7-11

Our passage of Scripture this morning is probably one that is familiar to you. Jesus teaches his followers that we should engage in prayer with our Heavenly Father by asking, seeking and knocking. At first glance, these terms seem easy enough. In fact, they may even seem synonymous. However, if you have ever been diligently searching for someone or something, you can see the progression in these terms. When we present our prayers to God, we begin simply by asking. If we do not receive an answer from the Lord, Jesus tells us we should seek, which implies a more diligent effort. Finally, if we still do not receive an answer, we should not be discouraged but should knock continually at God's door by persisting in prayer. We ultimately must trust God's character in our prayer life: he is good and gives good things to those who ask him!

### Tuesday, October 27 | Matthew 7:12-14

We were reminded yesterday to seek God continually in prayer. One of the good things God grants Christians is his own presence: the Holy Spirit. It is the presence of the Spirit that fills and forms the believer. It is the Spirit who transforms our lives and actions into conformity with Christ. It is also the Spirit who enables us to live in a new way that honors God, an impossible task of our own effort.

Matthew 7:12 records the "Golden Rule," which requires that we love others and treat them accordingly, just as we would wish to be treated. In our own human efforts, this is an impossible task. However, we can trust that the Holy Spirit indwells us and enables us to respond to others in ways that honor God.

Lord, as we go about our work and activities today, would you help us to see others as you see them and respond accordingly: with grace, patience and love!

### Wednesday, October 28 | Matthew 7:15-20

When I was growing up, we had a pear tree in our backyard. As the blossoms turned to tiny fruits, my brother and I would be so excited. We would wait for them to grow into large pears before we picked them. I can hardly remember one that tasted very good; they were almost always tart enough to make you squirm! Most of our pears ended up as treats to Pete the horse. While Pete seemed to enjoy them, the tart pears were indicative of something wrong with the tree or growing conditions.

Jesus teaches us in this passage that a healthy tree bears good fruit. Each of us must pause to examine our lives and the kind of fruit we bear. Would others around you say that your "fruit" is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and gentleness? Galatians 5:22-23 records these as the fruit of the Spirit, which is the produce that is evident in our life when the Holy Spirit is active within us. If the fruit of your life has been scarce or "tart," the answer is not to try harder. Instead, we must rely more deeply on the God who can change the bitter produce in our lives to the something sweet.



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## Week Four : Matthew 7:7-29 October 26 - November 1 | Hayden Walker

### Thursday, October 29 | Matthew 7:21-23

Have you ever found yourself speaking one thing with your mouth, while thinking something completely different in your mind? This is certainly not a new problem in the twenty-first century, nor was it new in the first century. In fact, the Lord warned his people centuries before through the prophet Isaiah about such behavior saying, “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught” (Isa. 29:13).

This type of disconnect is sinful, and in Jesus’ warning here, it might even prove fatal. Jesus says that simply speaking religious words, or calling “Lord, Lord,” will not achieve salvation. Instead, it must be born from the heart. It is those people who do the will of the Father who will be saved.

May we honor God with every aspect of our lives: our hearts, our intentions and our actions—as well as our lips.

### Friday, October 30 | Matthew 7:24-29

For over 1000 years, the St. Lawrence Fortress has stood strong in Dubrovnik, Croatia. From its protective and steady walls, soldiers were able to defend the republic of Dubrovnik against enemies for 800 years. The construction of this fortress is unique; it appears to rise right out of the dense limestone rock upon which it is built. It seems that no wind, crashing of the sea, storm or flood could ever shake it. However, it is not necessarily the construction of the fortress itself that is remarkable: it is the astounding foundation, the 120 feet of limestone that raises the fortress out of the sea, which has preserved the structure for a millennium.

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by urging his listeners to build their houses, that is to say their lives, upon a lasting foundation. The only firm and enduring foundation that exists is Christ Jesus himself. It is upon him alone that we must build our lives. Like the St. Lawrence fortress, we are nothing admirable in ourselves. The one who holds us up and sustains us and protects us from the storms of life is the one to be admired.

If today you look down at the foundation of your life and see that it is built on the sand of possessions, status, a career, achievements, now is the time to realign yourself to the only foundation that will last, both in this life and in the one to come.

### Saturday, October 31 - Sunday, November 1 | Matthew 5-7

This weekend try to read Matthew 5-7 in one sitting. As you do, reflect on what God has been teaching you over the last four weeks and ask God to help you become a more faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.