

How to Move Mountains & Influence People

**The Gospel of Matthew as Handbook
for Jesus' Mission and Ours
Part One**

Leader's Guide



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

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*How to Move Mountains and Influence People:
The Gospel of Matthew as Handbook for Jesus' Mission and Ours
Part One: Matthew 3 – 7
Leader's Guide*

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Introduction: Moving Mountains

I don't know how many times I've heard some enthusiastic preacher say, 'If you have faith, you can move mountains!' If you 'grew up in church,' chances are you've heard it, too.

For most modern, non-Jewish readers, 'mountain' equals 'obstacle.' After all, we use that metaphor in various ways. For example, the Motown song croons, 'Baby there ain't no mountain high enough...to keep me from getting to you, babe.' It means, 'No *obstacle* is going to hold me back from you.' The phrase, 'Make a mountain out of a molehill,' means to make a big *problem* out of something that is not. And Jesus said to his disciples, 'If you have faith the size of this mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you' (Mt.17:20). He said something similar to them when he was entering Jerusalem for the last time (Mt.21:21).

So if you have faith in God, you can move 'mountains,' right? You can tell *obstacles* to skip away?

Unfortunately not.

For a Jewish reader, and especially to the Jewish disciples, 'mountain' did not mean 'obstacle.' Instead, 'mountain' meant 'presence of God.' Maybe the top of a mountain represented a space closer to heaven, or a place that was set apart. Whatever the exact reason, there was this pattern in the Bible: God began His relationship with key people, and gave them a mission, from a mountain.

1. Adam and Eve met God on a mountain, Eden. How do we know that? Notice that in Genesis 2:10, four rivers diverged from Eden, nourishing life. That most likely means that the source of water was on a mountain, because rivers normally do not diverge in nature; they converge. Lest we have any doubt, Ezekiel says Eden was a mountain (Ezk.28:13 – 14).
2. After humanity went its own way, Abraham and Sarah also met God on a mountain. When God called them, they promptly pitched their tent on a mountain and built an altar to worship God (Gen.12:8).
3. Israel met with God on a mountain, Sinai. After He delivered Israel from Egypt, God called Israel up onto Mount Sinai to meet Him face to face (Ex.19:13).¹ They refused, so God met with Moses on the mountain instead. But God's Plan A had been for to meet all Israel on the mountain. God's Plan B was to meet with Israel in a very limited way, through representative priests and one high priest who represented Moses.
4. That arrangement carried over to Mount Zion, to the Temple in Jerusalem built by King David and his son, King Solomon. From that point, God invested His presence on Mount Zion, in the Temple. He called the entire world, really, to meet with Him there, albeit in a limited, Plan B type of way. But for centuries, devout Jews looked to Mount Zion as the place to encounter God.

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
In the city of our God, *His holy mountain*.
Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth,
Is *Mount Zion* in the far north, the city of the great King.' (Ps.48:1 – 2)

¹ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), p.51 – 59

Jesus was replacing the Temple as the new dwelling place of God (Mt.11:25 – 27; 12:6). He said he was greater than the Temple on Mount Zion, in effect, moving back to God’s Plan A. Even when Jesus made reference to faith moving ‘*this* mountain,’ the mountain he was referring to was the mountain upon which he was just transfigured with glory (Mt.17:1 – 13). Jesus was showing how he was bringing the presence of God the way God always wanted: *within* human beings. God was starting *in Jesus*. He would continue with Jesus’ followers. That’s why Peter’s request to stay on the mountain was inappropriate. His mission was to make the presence of God available to everyone who believes, no matter where they are! God never wanted His presence to be limited to any mountain, whether it was Eden, Sinai, Zion, or the mountain of Jesus’ transfiguration. But what the disciples experienced on ‘*this* mountain,’ they would be able to move *anywhere*. They would be able to take the presence of God *wherever they went*. So you can expect to influence people by offering them a chance to respond to the living God.

Then when Jesus was confronting the Temple for the last time, he said, ‘If you say to *this* mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it will happen’ (Mt.21:21, emphasis mine). What did Jesus mean? From the imagery of creation (Gen.1:1 – 2:3), ‘the sea’ was the opposite place as ‘the land’ on which God’s true humanity dwelled. The prophet Daniel used ‘the sea’ as a metaphor to mean ‘the Gentiles’ in contrast to Israel (Dan.7:2 – 3). Jesus had the book of Daniel on his mind as he approached his death and resurrection (Mt.24:15; 26:64; plus the countless times Jesus took to himself Daniel’s ‘Son of Man’ title for the Messiah). Daniel wasn’t the only one to connect ‘the sea’ with ‘the Gentiles’; Isaiah had called the Sea of Galilee ‘Galilee of the *Gentiles*’ (Isa.9:1 – 2). Matthew quotes that Isaiah passage about ‘Galilee of the *Gentiles*’ to explain Jesus’ ministry there (Mt.4:15 – 16). Jesus himself probably taught from Isaiah during his ministry, and of course, his ministry in Galilee involved Gentiles (Mt.8:8 – 13; 8:28 – 34; 12:17 – 21; 12:38 – 42; 15:21 – 28; 15:29 – 39) because Gentiles lived there along with Jews. And finally, Jesus stood on a mountain overlooking the Sea of Galilee when he gave his disciples his ‘great commission’ (Mt.28:16 – 20). His location underscored his point about moving the ‘mountaintop presence of God’ from Zion to among the ‘sea’ of the *Gentiles* (Mt.21:21). The disciples could cast the presence of God (‘*this* mountain’) to be among the *Gentiles*.

In essence, you can move mountains in the sense that you can take the presence of God with you wherever you go: your family and friendships; your dorm; your dining hall; the classes and study groups you’re part of; the clubs and extracurricular interests you have. Be connected to Jesus by his Spirit. Be shaped by Jesus. Yes, he will help you deal with obstacles in your life. But he may not make them magically go away. Instead, you can be so transformed by Jesus and so saturated with God’s presence that *you* and your Christian community can be the place where other people meet with God.

Do you want to read – and live in – God’s story? Deeply, intelligently, whole heartedly? This study guide is designed to help you grasp not only Jesus’ training of his disciples in his mission, but also the most important themes of the whole biblical story.

Do you want to be so saturated with the presence of God that you and your community can help others meet the true and living God in your midst? Read on.

As you do, expect that Jesus will ask you to do something, to act on your growing convictions, to share your life and faith, and make concrete choices to let him express his life and love through you. This curriculum is not for passive receiving, or even just memorization! Jesus means for us to live it out.

Glad you can join in on this journey!

Chapter 1: Starting to Read Matthew's Gospel: Devotional Reflections

These short reflections are meant to accompany your study of the Gospel of Matthew. The reason I start from the end of Matthew is because Jesus' goal was to train his disciples for the 'Great Commission,' Jesus' mission to bring God's healing and transforming love to the world. Jesus goes with us to call and develop followers of his everywhere. Jesus will repeat certain basic patterns with us as he did with his original disciples. Therefore, we have to read the Gospel of Matthew with the *ending* in mind.

Please make time to finish these ten reflections early on. They will help you get to know Matthew as the author. They will help you understand a little bit about how important the Gospel of Matthew has been in church history. They will *really* help you as you study and teach the rest of the Gospel of Matthew.

To illustrate how Jesus has shaped his people by his word, these reflections also intentionally draw from many different church traditions. May they nourish, inspire, and sustain you as you get to know Jesus better, and participate in his mission more and more! And may Jesus-honoring stories one day be told of you.

More devotional reflections on all parts of Matthew's Gospel can be found on my website here: <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/bible-messiah-matthew>.

The Kingdom of Heaven: The Centerpiece of Matthew's Gospel: Mt.28:18

^{28:18} All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Most corporations and organizations have a mission statement. The mission of Amazon.com is, 'To be the most customer-centric company in the world, where people can find and discover anything they want to buy online.' Goldman Sachs says, 'Our goal is to provide superior returns to our shareholders.' When people sign up to work, they sign up for a mission.

Jesus, too, had a mission: To inaugurate the 'kingdom of heaven' on earth. He sought to establish the very reign of God upon the earth. From his very first public announcement, he proclaimed this 'kingdom' and called subjects into it (4:17 – 25). He defined the kingdom in terms of a sphere where God's transforming power would be released among His subjects, especially on the heart level (5:1 – 7:29). He taught his disciples to pray, 'Your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven' (6:10). Jesus speaks of the 'kingdom of heaven' thirty two times in Matthew, using the shorthand 'the kingdom' almost twenty more times; clearly Jesus felt it was important! Jesus' mission was a revolution that would ripple outward from the hearts of people, into social relationships, to challenge the realms of human evil and the demonic. The kingdom of God would be manifested by His loyal subjects, Jesus' followers, to a hurting and rebellious world.

Jesus tells of his decisive victory in this unfolding drama by his statement at the end of Matthew's Gospel, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth' (28:18). He said that after he had entered sin and death in his crucifixion and came through on the other side in

his resurrection. The authority over the nations that once belonged to the devil (4:8 – 9) now belonged to Jesus. And whereas at that precise moment, the devil had taken Jesus to a high mountain to show him all the nations of the world, now Jesus stood on a high mountain overlooking those same nations. Maybe it was the very same high mountain, and now Jesus is standing on it as the rightful king of all humanity? Who knows? One thing we do know: The poetry of the situation is unmistakable. God had planted Jesus' throne exactly where the devil's throne was, and a huge battle was about to ensue for the transformation of all humanity.

What would that look like? Here's one way it looked: William was born in England to a wealthy and influential family. Soon after graduating from Cambridge University in 1780, the rather spoiled and high-society William was elected to Parliament. At that time, he bowed to the authority of fashion, whim, popular opinion, and wealth. Soon afterwards, however, he read a book that led him to ask some soul-searching questions. He then studied the New Testament voraciously. This led to his acceptance of Jesus Christ's authority as final and ultimate. John and Charles Wesley, leaders of the Methodist movement, and John Newton, the former slave trader turned hymn writer who wrote *Amazing Grace* encouraged him to use his office, not for himself, but to express Christ's love and Christ's reign over him. So William first started improving working conditions in factories. Millions of men, women and children had no choice but to work sixteen hours, six days a week in grim factories. People had come to the cities to find work but had been exploited and crowded together in filthy apartments where they caught cholera, typhoid, and tuberculosis.

William was convinced, however, that there was no greater moral issue for England's conscience than slavery. Although slave labor wasn't permitted in England itself, trafficking in African slaves and the exploitation of their labor formed the backbone of the Imperial economy. William decided he would not rest until his country recognized the cruelty and injustice of this system. He started delivering speeches everywhere, circulated petitions, and introduced bills in Parliament calling for the immediate abolition of slavery. In the privileged circles that he was from, he became very unpopular. The rich claimed that slavery was indispensable to the plantation economy of the colonies, arguing that money was the final authority. But William wouldn't stop. Even when his first bill, in 1791, was defeated by a landslide of 163 votes to 88, he didn't give up. Discouragement and great odds were not his final authority. Finally in 1806, after twenty years of long, hard campaigning, William Wilberforce won the argument. A bill in Parliament was passed outlawing slave trading in all British colonies from the year 1807. Still the struggle continued for another 25 years to win the complete emancipation of all slaves in the British Empire. That second bill was eventually passed in 1833, just weeks before William's death on July 29, 1833. Seven hundred thousand slaves were then freed. Upon his death, William Wilberforce was acclaimed a national hero and he was buried with full honors in Westminster Abbey. Walden Media released the movie *Amazing Grace* about Wilberforce in March 2007.² Here was a man who acknowledged Jesus' authority – and no other authority – over himself. And what a transformation occurred!

A mentor once asked me, 'Can Jesus be Savior but not Lord?' I thought about that question for a long time and decided no. In reality, Jesus saves us by being our Lord. He saves us from our own sin and evil by challenging every other form of authority to which we bow down. He even saves us from ourselves – that is, the corruption in our human nature. That is why the angel Gabriel announces in the beginning, 'He will save his people from their sins' (Mt.1:21). Jesus does not save us 'from' the wrath of God, but 'by' the wrath of God. Jesus

² distilled from Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), p.326 – 327

guides the wrath of God with surgical precision by rooting out sinfulness from human nature, first in himself, and then in us by his Spirit. He saves us by expressing his good and gracious Lordship over us, and by empowering us as his subjects. ‘All authority has been given to me.’ So there can be no false dichotomy here. Jesus is Savior by being Lord. His mission is to bring people under his Lordship.

The Movement: Extending the Reign of Jesus, Part One: Mt.28:19 – 20

^{28:19} Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...

When Jesus says this, who is he asking to teach others what Jesus taught? Your pastor? I believe he is asking *you* to do it.

After my sophomore year in college, I went home for the summer. I was living in Los Angeles. I got a phone call from a young woman who had just finished her freshman year in UCLA. She was the younger sister of a friend and classmate of mine. She said, ‘During the school year, I became a Christian. I’m the only Christian in the family. My parents are completely against it. They won’t let me go to church or anything called Christian. I called you because you’re the only Christian I know. What should I do?’ I felt very stuck. I asked, ‘Well, I guess I could meet with you, and I can call a few other people to see if they could, too. Is there a time that you usually go out of the house? So that you won’t have to lie to your parents but you don’t have to tell them either?’ She said, ‘I go rollerblading at 8am every Saturday morning in the park outside my house.’ Inwardly, I groaned, ‘Yikes, Saturdays at 8am? This is my summer!!’ But I said, ‘I’ll make some phone calls.’ I called every Christian I knew from my high school, explaining the situation. They said, ‘Saturday at 8am?! That’s crazy!’ But one girl who was still in high school (we had all gone to the same high school) eagerly said yes. So the three of us met every Saturday at 8am that summer. We studied Ephesians because that’s what I had studied during the school year in my college fellowship. We had a great time. We talked about and prayed about her family, and helped her navigate the tough situation a little bit. The next summer, I got another phone call. The same situation. The three of us met again in the park every Saturday at 8am. We studied Matthew 5 – 7, the Sermon on the Mount. And then, some Korean-American guys at the high school we all went to heard about this, and they asked me if I could come meet with them and teach them about studying the Bible. So I went to my old high school. My teachers said, ‘Mako, it’s great to see you! What are you doing here?’ I said, ‘There’s a group of guys here who wanted some help reading and studying the Bible. I’m a Christian now and enjoy that.’ So I got a chance to share my faith a bit with my old high school teachers!

That early experience burned a conviction in me that Jesus’ kingdom movement is outward-oriented. I’m convinced that the way to keep that outward orientation strong was to invest deeply in people, especially in their knowledge of Jesus through Scripture. That means that you and I need to be prepared to disciple someone with Scripture. By comparison, what I see often in my work now as a campus minister is that Christian college students extract a seeker/new Christian from their non-Christian friends by inviting them to all kinds of church meetings. The older Christians miss the fact that non-Christians perceive that as ‘stealing their friend away.’ What if you were able to actually hang out more with the seeker/new Christian

(call him Pat) in his own context? Then you would see how Pat relates to his non-Christian friends. You would hear the questions that the friends ask Pat as they observe the changes in Pat's life. You could help Pat respond with the love of Jesus. You could help Pat deal with whatever character issues are going on inside him. Pat would become a partner in ministry. And the outward movement of Jesus would continue outward.

This series of reflections is designed to help you be prepared and equipped for just such a thing. Are you interested in making a commitment to reading Matthew's Gospel, and these reflections?

The Movement: Extending the Reign of Jesus, Part Two: Mt.28:19

28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...

Inigo (Ignatius) Lopez de Loyola was born to a noble family in the kingdom of Castile, in Spain. The youngest of thirteen children, he spent his youth in court and later as a soldier in the service of the Spanish king. He was trained in the code of honor and chivalry, always ready with his sword to avenge any disrespect to himself or to his master. But in 1521, he was struck in the leg by a cannonball while defending Pamplona unsuccessfully against the French. Back in his family castle, he went through some excruciating operations, including having his leg re-broken, with a stub sawn-off, his leg reset and stretched by weights (Yikes!!). During his long recovery, to take his mind off the pain, he asked for something to read. He loved chivalrous romances but instead, he was given a collection of biographies of Christian saints, many of whom dared to leave home and safety to tell enemies about Jesus. At first, he only read these books because he was *that* bored. But gradually, he started to find them...strangely fascinating! When he was fully recovered, he made a resolution to live his life for Jesus, allowed Jesus to change his life, and began to imitate the example of the saints he had read about. Earlier in his life, he would have gone abroad for war, as a soldier for his king. What an even greater honor to go abroad for peace, as a soldier for a different King. When he was well enough to walk, he set off on a pilgrimage to a church. After a night of prayer, he exchanged his rich clothes with a beggar and laid his sword and dagger on the church's altar. Then he walked to the town of Manresa, where he spent several months in solitary reflection. This eventually led to his famous book *Spiritual Exercises*, a series of guided meditations basically designed for 'busy people' to pray reflectively. He went to France to study at the University of Paris. While there, he persuaded a small group of six to join him in forming a new spiritual order. They became the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits. They expanded and set out immediately for foreign lands to do missionary evangelism. Many died as martyrs. Their commitment to social justice and their tendency to put the gospel cause ahead of national interests provoked the suspicion of many secular rulers. But Ignatius was the dynamic leader of the order. Despite all the obstacles, he saw the Jesuits increase from ten members to a thousand.

Jesus inspires these kinds of noble biographies; he certainly has one (in a sense, four). But he also inspired those we now call 'saints' to continue his mission to the world. St. Ignatius was inspired by them, and beyond them, by Jesus himself to care for the world. As a result, Ignatius defined a new way to pray (now called the *examen* and used very widely) and founded a new evangelistic and intellectually rigorous 'society' in the late medieval Catholic Church, whose members, in turn, led many others to Christ around the world. That illustrates Jesus'

process of discipleship. Jesus' teachings are meant to be embodied, so they can be passed on, from person to person. And they are to be constantly directed outward, to the world which does not yet know him. 'Go, make disciples of all peoples.'

Jesus' mission is to bring people under his Lordship. But how does he do that today? Primarily through his disciples: Jesus trained his disciples to manifest his kingdom – his reign over them – to the world and continue his mission. From the beginning to the end of his earthly interactions with his disciples, everything he did was for the sake of imparting his mission to them. Thus, all four Gospels conclude with Jesus commissioning the disciples to reach the world. The Christian community calls the one recorded in Matthew 28:16 – 20 the 'Great Commission.' Jesus said, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations' (28:19).

How did Jesus impart his mission? From the time he first called his disciples, he set their expectation that they would be 'fishers of people' (4:19). He promised to renovate their hearts, first with regards to anger (5:21 – 26) particularly towards their enemies, whom Jesus instructed to love (5:38 – 48)! The hated Romans were the Jewish disciples' closest real enemies, though the Samaritans and other factions in Israel might have come in for a close second or third place. Jesus taught them to reach the world. When Jesus had them do evangelism in Israel, he would follow that up quickly with evangelism in the Gentile lands across the Sea of Galilee (8:27 – 34 and 15:21 – 39). He called them to forgive radically, especially enemies (6:14 – 15 and 18:21 – 35). Then Jesus modeled for them the sacrificial life he was calling them to lead when he went to his death on behalf of others, even his own enemies (26:47 – 27:54). By the time Jesus finally met with the disciples on the mountain and gave them the 'Great Commission,' they could have probably guessed that he would say, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.'

The Great Commission is the climax of Jesus' training of the disciples, and his baton-passing to them. We have to pass this heart for global evangelism onto others, as well. We must not take new Christians and simply acculturate them to the Christian culture of our little group, which is sometimes implicitly characterized by the statements, 'we don't drink,' 'we use this weird Christian language,' and 'we attend these meetings.' That leads to a self-satisfied Christian arrogance, as well as a shallow, stale spirituality; if our Christian community is characterized this way, it's probably because we don't have Jesus' heart for the world at all. Not to mention that the Christians often get bored, and become rather boring people as well.

Instead, we are to point people beyond ourselves to Jesus and his love for the world, hopefully because we, too, are seeking to grow into Jesus' heart for the world. World evangelism is the sharp edge of the love of God. He is constantly transforming us in himself and into his mission. If our mission field for now is the whole campus, because the world is represented by students from many different countries, then we must continue on in the love of Christ to engage others with Jesus. That is what keeps us always praying for, hoping for, and reaching beyond what our little group looks like now.

Notice what happens when we see the Great Commission this way? Everything else Jesus did prior to this makes sense. Why love your enemies? Not just because of some individual moral code, but because of Jesus' mission. Why pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven? Because of Jesus' mission. Why 'cross the Sea of Galilee' to reach the Gentiles? Because of Jesus' mission. Why remember Jesus' death and resurrection? Because of Jesus' mission. It's not that everything we do is evangelism, evangelism, evangelism. But everything we do ought to be for the sake of evangelism, in other words, for the sake of the world. Far from losing everything else, we find new meaning for all we do.

The Movement: Extending the Reign of Jesus, Part Three: Mt.28:19

^{28:19} Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...

The noun form of the word ‘disciple’ means ‘a learner,’ so the verb form ‘disciple’ basically means ‘to teach.’ When Jesus called his first followers, they were called his ‘disciples’ because he was teaching them, or discipling them. Here’s some of my story involving one of the four major disciplers in my life. I committed my life to Jesus towards the end of my junior year of high school. My parents had just started arguing about divorce, so that really made me feel unstable. I also began to ask fairly deep questions about my purpose in life and what values I really believed in. I really wanted to understand the Bible. By the time I started my freshman year at Stanford, I was really confused. Not only that, but life was getting hard for me emotionally. I prayed that God would send someone to mentor me. When I got back to campus after Christmas break, a guy named David Miyahara knocked at my door. He was a grad student in the Asian American fellowship that I had visited (this fellowship had undergrad and grads together). He was doing his doctorate in sociology. But his real passion, he said, was developing and discipling others. My ears perked up. ‘Hey, could you disciple me? I want to learn more about the Bible,’ I asked. He and I began meeting once a week, and I loved it. He also came from a broken home, and he walked me through how he dealt with things. I learned more about being Asian American, and he helped me put words to experiences that I had that I hadn’t been able to talk about before. I enjoyed his sense of humor, and how he related to people. He gave great advice, not just to me, but to a lot of others. He helped me through my leadership roles in the fellowship. And he answered or tried to answer all these burning bible questions I had. We would sit and talk for 3 or 4 hours at a time; I was so hungry for an older spiritual brother to disciple me. During our first five months together, David walked me through Matthew 5 – 7. During my sophomore year, we studied Romans. During my junior year, we studied Daniel. During my senior year, we brought three other guys together and read a book on inner healing and Christian counseling.

Sometime during our second year together, David said to me that he hoped I was being prepared to disciple others in the future. He was clear about that on several occasions, because he recognized that Christian discipleship is meant to be reproduced. Since then, I’ve had the privilege of discipling younger men and women in the very same material I was taught, and it’s been a great experience. I learn at least as much as they do.

I think it is very important to have mentors and mentees, in essence, to have discipleship happening all around you. Just to set your minds on fire: Suppose there are 40 of you in a fellowship or church. Suppose each of you were to help 1 person come to faith in Christ this year. Suppose each of you were equipped to and meet with him or her for 2 years, teaching, mentoring, and discipling them. Then, there would be 80 of you. Suppose the 80 of you each help 1 person come to faith, and then for 2 years, disciple them. Then there would be 160 of you. Ten years from now, there would be 1,280 of you. Twenty years from now, there would be 40,960. Thirty years from now, there would be 1,310,720! Now, mentoring younger believers doesn’t have to happen in a one-on-one setting. It can and should be more communal, since we are all *Jesus*’ disciples, not Joe’s disciples, or Jane’s. But a basic tool for helping people meet Jesus and for discipling younger believers could be really handy. Matthew provides that, and we’ll explore that next.

For now, think through what has been invested in you through sermons, bible studies, godly wisdom, advice, ministry skills, mentors, role models, etc. How else would you like to grow? How can you take that knowledge, package it so it's reproducible, and invest it into other people? Which people?

The Transformation Jesus Brings, Part One: Mt.28:19

28:19 ...baptizing them...

Something happens to us when we enter the reign of Jesus. Jesus wanted us to understand it, so he left us with a peculiar symbol: baptism.

Apparently Jesus continued the practice of baptism from his cousin and predecessor, John the Baptist. That wild-looking fellow, John, used to stand in the Jordan River decrying the corruption and injustice around him and calling people to be symbolically 'cleansed' of all that filth by being dunked in the water. That's a pretty effective symbolic gesture, isn't it?

It's even more effective considering the story that the Jewish people understood. God called forth life from water. Three epochal examples form the framework. In creation, God's Spirit hovered over the primordial waters and brought forth land, life, and humanity. But Adam and Eve failed. In Noah's time, God's Spirit hovered over the floodwaters and brought Noah and his family from out of the bloodshed of their time to emerge as a 'new humanity.' But Noah failed. In Moses' time, God led Israel out of their old life of Egyptian slavery through the waters of the Red Sea and into a garden land to be another 'new humanity.' But they, too, failed. Finally, one man was baptized in the waters of the Jordan River: Jesus of Nazareth. He was the one man who did not fail.

Time after time, God pushed back mighty waters to bring forth new human life. So what more fitting symbol than baptism? It's all about being God's fresh, new humanity. You make an individual choice to submerge yourself under the waters. Then you rise up, breaking through the waters as if God were calling you up out of primordial waters of old. That's what baptism means. It symbolizes a 'dying' and a 'rising.'

When we get baptized, what does it symbolize? The dying and rising *of Jesus*. I notice two main reasons in the New Testament for this. First, we become spiritually linked to Jesus' own death and resurrection, the most pivotal transformation any human being has ever experienced (Rom.6:1 – 11; Col.2:12). For example, in his water baptism witnessed by John the Baptist (Mt.3:13 – 17), Jesus confessed the sin present in his own humanity, not because he sinned, but for us, to lead us into confession. He drowned its resistance to the love of God, for us. Throughout his life, Jesus poured out the wrath of God onto his own humanity, within his own divine-human person, by preventing his human nature from sinning. He finally killed it on the cross, his baptism into death. He completed God's judgment on the flesh and came out the other side, into the new life of his resurrection, in a God-soaked human body that would never play host to sin or death again. So a spiritual connection with Jesus is what allows us to participate in this new life he has. Jesus died the death we were already dying, to give us the life we could never live on our own. We die and rise with him when we believe in him.

Second, something very core and fundamental to us dies when we bow before Jesus: our self-centeredness above all. When I came to Jesus, it was a bit painful. I had to admit that I was wrong, that I couldn't live my life by myself any more, and that I had hurt people and I had to

stop denying it. It felt like I was dying, a little bit. Jesus himself said that it would feel that way (Mt.16:24 – 26; Mk.8:34 – 36; Lk.9:23 – 25). But I also experienced fresh, new life, something Jesus also spoke of. I felt like a new person with Jesus.

Notice that Jesus did not die *instead* of us, where we watch from a distance. And it's not that God just changed His mind about us while leaving us the same old people we always were. Rather, Jesus died *ahead* of us, to rise ahead of us, and then he pulled us through that dying and rising, so that we become new with him and in him. The more I get to know Jesus, the more I understand what in fact happened to me when I first believed in him, the more I live as a new person.

No wonder baptism symbolizes *our* 'dying and rising' experience *with Jesus*. It reminds us and others who watch that Jesus has changed us. He is still changing us, true, and he is certainly not done! But something in us has so profoundly changed that our core identity is now washed clean, and made new, by Jesus. We could hardly have a better symbol; we have only to understand and explain it: 'You, too, can be made new!'

The Transformation Jesus Brings, Part Two: Mt.28:19

28:19 ...baptizing them...

I enjoy the *Bourne Identity*, *Supremacy*, *Ultimatum* movie trilogy. The overall story deals with the issue of identity. Fittingly, the story begins and ends with baptism scenes. I don't think Robert Ludlum, the author of the original books, was a Christian. Nor do I think the director of the movies is. From what I can tell, it's a pure coincidence that this parallel exists. But I'm going to use the storyline of Jason Bourne to illustrate something about the Christian life.

We get to know Jason Bourne at his first 'baptism.' He is unconscious, adrift in the ocean off the coast of Marseilles, France, with two gunshot wounds in his back. Rescued by a fishing boat, he struggles to recover his memory from the fog of amnesia that cuts off memories of his life prior to being pulled out of the water. By tracing small clues, he learns that he was a highly trained CIA assassin with the name Jason Bourne. He decides that he will start a new life and leave his old life behind. Bourne had been tasked with killing an African dictator, but had given up on his mission because of the man's children. When he aborted his mission, he was shot twice and fell overboard into the ocean. Jason Bourne's attempt at starting a new life ended with a 'death' of sorts.

But the CIA won't let Bourne go so easily. They pursue him, eventually pushing him to expose the whole façade of lies and intrigue that hides the assassin program from the public. In the middle of the third movie, Bourne explains why he is so reluctant to kill others: He wants to undo all the wrongs he had done before. By the end of the third movie, Bourne acquires classified files, discovers that his past name was David Webb, gets the files into the right hands to expose the CIA, and escapes by jumping off a building into the Hudson River. For a moment, we're uncertain if CIA villain Noah Vosen succeeded in shooting him. But then we see Bourne swimming away. It's another 'baptism' scene that reminds us that we first met this man when he was almost dead in the ocean. This time, his attempt at starting his new life has finally succeeded. He knows who he really is – and it is David Webb, the man he was before he became the lethal assassin Jason Bourne, the man he now knows he should have always remained.

These ‘baptism’ scenes illustrate a man’s central struggle: to shake himself free of the corrupt identity that he had willingly chosen, and to return to the man he was. Curiously enough, they are a decent analogy for each human being’s central struggle: to shake free of the corrupt, false identity that each of us willingly chose, and to return to the person God always meant for us to be. That is why Jesus wanted to mark us with a baptism. Baptism represents the change in our identity. If we have joined ourselves to Jesus by faith in him, we have become and are becoming the person God always meant for us to be.

Knowing God’s Name Transforms Us, and Why: Mt.28:19

28:19 ...baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God had used various names for Himself before. In the long history of Israel, the God of Israel allowed Himself to be called ‘LORD of this’ and ‘LORD of that.’ To be a ‘lord,’ after all, is a relational designation: he had to be ‘lord’ of someone or something. Usually, some characteristic or activity was appended to the word ‘LORD’ or YHWH/Jehovah. These were ‘pet names’ or ‘nicknames’ for God.

Mystery surrounded one particular Old Testament name for God. In the Ancient Near East, ‘El’ was already being used as name for a mighty god. But the Jews called their God ‘Elohim’ – a strange name or nickname because it already contained the plural form; anything that ends in ‘im’ is a plural form in Hebrew. It might have been heard as, ‘The mighty God who is more than One’ or something like that. This Elohim created the heavens and the earth (Gen.1:1 – 2:3). Already in the Jewish understanding of God, there is a mysterious complexity.

Then, in one of the most important creeds of Israel, the Shema, comes the statement, ‘Hear O Israel, the LORD your God is one’ (Dt.4:5 – 6). The word for ‘one’ actually means ‘unified,’ as if there were more than one, but they are one in action, or one in purpose. It’s the same thought as when husband and wife are said to be ‘one.’ Again, there is a mysterious complexity behind the text of the Old Testament. It’s as if something was yet to be revealed.

Now, Jesus comes along and says that the one name of God to be used by his people is the name, ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’ This is God’s name. And the symbol of baptism – symbolizing the transforming, death to life experience that Jesus calls us into – is one of our responses to this one true God who has one name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But doesn’t that sound like three names? Grammatically, shouldn’t Jesus have said, ‘...in the *names* of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’? What kind of name is that?

On the other hand, how can they truly be separate names? How can the Father be called *Father* unless he is the Father of someone, namely his Son? And how can the Son be called *Son* unless he is the Son of someone, namely his Father? To be *Father* is to be *Father of*. To be *Son* is to be *Son of*. These are relational designations. Even the Spirit is a relational designation. The Spirit is the *Spirit of* someone, in this case, the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

Why are we to understand the one God this way? If we perceive God like this, then we are perceiving relationships of a sort we can just barely understand. Whoever the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit truly are, they are inseparable, and cannot be understood without each other. When we say that the one name of God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are attesting to that.

But how can we perceive the inner relation between the Son and the Father – as Jesus knows it – by standing *outside God*? We cannot. Among *people*, we can perceive father-son

relationships as being between two *distinct and separate* individuals with two distinct and separate names. But for reasons that strain the human mind, we cannot say that about God: God is not two or three distinct individuals. He is one being. Huh???

If we perceive this relation between Son and Father in God, then something has happened to us, too. If we can call God our *Father*, then we must somehow be in the same place as Jesus the *Son*, the only one who can naturally call God *Father*. The Spirit has drawn us inside Jesus and sustains us there. We know God from the vantage point of being *in Jesus* and *by the Spirit*. We are caught up into the very relations within God, the very love of God.

Needless to say, something profound has happened. We have been immersed and transformed into God Himself, in a spiritual baptism that goes far beyond the outward physical symbol. We've died to our independent, self-centered selves, and risen new in the being of another: an interdependent, other-centered God who is that way *in His very being*. We have come to life inside God, suspended in the loving relations of the Trinity.

The closest analogy I can think of comes from an experience I had one summer when I was 19 years old. I was having dinner with the family of a friend of mine. This family was very warm, and it was a refreshing contrast with my family, which at the time was troubled: My parents had been arguing about getting a divorce for three years, as they struggled with alcohol, money, and other things that had become tied into their relationship; a coldness had set into our daily routine and conversations. But in my friend's family, the dad and mom held hands while they invited me into conversation that made me feel known and cared for, and laughed with their three children. A part of me ached with longing. Could I become a part of a family like that?

If we knew about the love that exists within God, between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we would certainly feel the same. Praise God that He does not leave us as outsiders. He has made a way for us to actually participate in His very life. His name – a name of holy relationship – reminds us of that.

The Charter: Matthew's Literary Structure, Part One: Mt.28:20

28:20 ...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...

Each year, when my kids start a new grade in September at their elementary school, their teachers meet with us as parents. They tell us what they will cover during the school year. They have a goal of covering a certain amount of topics. They already know to what they will give our children exposure. And by the end of the year, our children should have become competent in those things. This is how all good teachers plan the curriculum they expect to cover. Similarly, Matthew is a good teacher who has planned his curriculum around Jesus' identity and mission. He designed it for us as students, and eventually for us as teachers, too.

Matthew finishes his Gospel with Jesus' command to his disciples that they teach others: 'teaching them to observe all that I commanded you' (Mt.28:20). They are not to produce merely *converts*, in a simplistic sense of that word. They are to produce *disciples*, full fledged followers of Jesus who abide by ALL Jesus' teaching. But what is ALL of that teaching? Matthew is surely not excluding what is included in Mark, Luke, and John, but at a minimum, we should look at how Matthew structures his Gospel around Jesus' teaching.

Matthew groups Jesus' teaching in five major blocks. Each section ends with a similar phrase:

Mt.7:28 When Jesus had finished **these words**.
Mt.11:1 When Jesus had finished giving **instructions**.
Mt.13:53 When Jesus had finished **these parables**.
Mt.19:1 When Jesus had finished **these words**.
Mt.26:1 When Jesus had finished **all these words**.

Matthew structures Jesus' actions and teaching in a pattern of five, in a structural allusion to the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), the original constitution-like document of Mosaic Israel. 'Torah' means 'teaching.' It's not that each 'section' of Matthew matches each 'book' of Moses; the structural allusion doesn't work quite that way.

The first section (1:1 – 7:28) deals with Jesus' identity and his teaching which transforms the human heart. The second section (8:1 – 11:1) is about Jesus healing us by his word, which builds the disciples' confidence that his word is powerful, a useful thing since Jesus sends them to do a short-term missions trip to Israel. The third section (11:2 – 13:53) deals with the mixed response to Jesus and how Jesus trains his disciples to interpret rejection; the Old Testament anticipated this, so it's not a failure of prophecy but a fulfillment. The fourth section (14:1 – 19:1) deals mainly with Jesus doing ministry with the disciples among the Gentiles, i.e. cross-cultural, multi-ethnic ministry. This is vital hands-on training for the Great Commission. The fifth section (19:2 – 26:1) deals with Jesus' final confrontation with the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, his parting of ways with them (ethically and socially), and his preparing the disciples for the fall of Jerusalem, the sign that he was indeed the Messiah.

One thing that we can do with Matthew's Gospel is use it as a kind of diagnostic tool. Some of us need Jesus to work on our hearts. Others of us need to experience the power of his healing word and develop our understanding of it. Others of us need to think more about kingdom expansion, to face our fears of rejection, to sharpen our minds, and get over our discomfort with making spiritual distinctions between true Christians and everyone else. Others might need to expand the range of people to whom we witness. Others may need to understand the key distinctions between Jesus and other figures – religious, literary, philosophical, or political – even if it reproduces the same conflicts Jesus experienced in his final days in Jerusalem. Spend some time thinking and praying about where you have been more or less developed. You might sense the Lord leading you to develop some area of your life.

Then comes a climactic summary epilogue where Jesus dies and rises again, and tells his disciples to 'go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.' That statement summarizes what came before. Look at the structure:

Mt.7:28 When Jesus had finished **these words**.
Mt.11:1 When Jesus had finished giving **instructions**.
Mt.13:53 When Jesus had finished **these parables**.
Mt.19:1 When Jesus had finished **these words**.
Mt.26:1 When Jesus had finished **all these words**.
Mt.28:16 – 20 Make disciples of all the nations...**teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**.

What does this mean about the *function* of Matthew's Gospel? Just as the Torah is Moses' *teaching*, so Matthew's Gospel is Jesus' *teaching*. And just as Moses' teaching was the founding

charter, the constitution, of *Mosaic* Israel, so Jesus' teaching is the founding charter, the constitution, of *Messianic* Israel. That is, the church.

Our founding charter commissions us to make *disciples*. But, just for the sake of clarity, it would be fair to say that it commissions us to make *disciplers*. That is, a disciple is someone who can do evangelism, help bring someone into Jesus' kingdom, and nurture and mentor that person. We are supposed to be able to develop a person from the threshold of faith in Jesus into maturity and then into someone who can disciple others in the same way. And those disciples of theirs are supposed to make disciples, and so on and so on. It's as if Matthew is saying to us, 'Go therefore and make *disciplers*. Carry this book with you wherever you go, and put it to good use.'

The Charter: Matthew's Literary Structure, Part Two: Mt.28:20

28:20 ...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...

Christian tradition holds that, after about twelve years in and around Jerusalem, the apostles divided up the world and went out to preach the word about Jesus. The 'Church of the East' held that the Jesus message arrived in India in 52 AD, China in 64 AD, and Japan in 70 AD. In India, the 'Mar Thoma' Christians trace their spiritual lineage back to Thomas (hence their name), and perhaps Bartholomew, who brought with them the *Gospel of Matthew*. In the early third century, Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, sent a man named Pantaenus to a region of India, who verified that a Christian community was already there. He brought back to Alexandria the *Gospel of Matthew* written in Hebrew characters.³

The *Gospel of Matthew* also found its way to China and Japan. In Japan, archaeologists peeled back some of the paint on one of the wooden beams of the Koryuji Buddhist Temple, the oldest Buddhist Temple in Kyoto, and found two crosses on it. Apparently, the building had been rebuilt on the frame of a building used for Christian worship in 670 AD, after it was seriously damaged by fire. That wooden beam is now preserved in the Tokyo National Museum. In addition, fragments of the *Gospel of Matthew* written in Chinese script were found inside the Buddhist Temple. They are relics testifying to the presence of Christians in Japan *before* Buddhism arrived on Japanese soil.

In China, we have a stone inscription dating from 638 AD testifying to an already large, established church in the ancient Chinese capital of Xian and influential in the upper levels of the Tang Dynasty. This stone describes Christian missionaries from Mesopotamia, lists Christian priests, and indicates that there were millions of Chinese Christians by the year 635 AD. I suspect that the Gospel of Matthew played a role in that church, because someone cared enough to translate it into Chinese script, and then take it to Japan.

In addition, in Vietnam, during the Hau Le period in the 16th century, churches, statues, and monuments of Jesus on the cross were unearthed. They dated back to a governor named Si Nghiep, who died in 226 AD.⁴ Apparently, he was a Christian. This means that Christian faith was present in Vietnam by the 2nd or 3rd century. Could Christian missionaries have arrived in India, China, Japan, and Vietnam at these extraordinarily early dates? Probably.

³ Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, ch.36

⁴ Pham Van Sohn, in *Viet Su Tan Bien*, published in Saigon by the Dai Nam, 1961, examines the earliest history of Christianity in Vietnam. See http://www.vnbaptist.net/Tai_Lieu/History_of_VN_bible.htm

What seems true, though, is this: The *Gospel of Matthew* played a key role in the formation of these earliest Christian communities. Why? Because this book commands that we live it, copy it, and hand it on.

Matthew structures his Gospel in the form of a familiar Hebrew pattern, a chiasm. In a chiasm, the first section mirrors the last, the second section mirrors the second to last, and so on, until you get to the center. The center is the turning point or place of emphasis. It was a literary structure that helped people memorize the material and discern a writer's intention. If you're interested, look at Matthew's arrangement of the material, down below. I believe that the center of Matthew's Gospel is the very inconspicuous verse, 13:52, which contains Jesus' words, 'Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.' Wow, isn't that weird?

But it makes sense. Matthew was a tax collector, a meticulous scribe who once counted coins for the Roman government taxing Israel. When he met Jesus, he became a different kind of scribe. He became a disciple of the kingdom, and as a scribe, he also asks us to become 'scribes' for Jesus' kingdom, too. That is, we are to copy Jesus' teaching and pass it on. In this case, Matthew is referring to his own book, but again, not in a way that excludes the other writings of the New Testament. And now that almost everyone has their own Bibles already, the text of Matthew is physically in people's hands, so to speak, but it still needs to be taken off the shelf.

The Kingdom Charter: We have been given this revolutionary document, which in the first few centuries shaped the greatest missionary movement we've ever seen. May it shape us and spur us on, too!

The Literary Structure of the Gospel of Matthew⁵

A. Jesus, Israel & the Gentiles, Fulfillment, God With Us (1:1 – 25)

Israel is still in exile, from the Babylonian captivity (1:11, 12, 17)

Gentiles included: Four Gentile women are included in Jesus' Jewish genealogy, the line of David (1:1 – 17)

An angel appears, announces fulfillment of what was spoken (1:22)

Immanuel: the title given to Jesus means 'God with us' (1:23)

B. Jesus as King, Rejected by Herod, Acknowledged by Magi (2:1 – 3:17)

Resistance from one ruler: King Herod (2:1ff.)

Jesus' title as 'king' or 'Messiah' occurs (2:2; 2:4; Micah's messianic prophecy of 'a ruler from Bethlehem' in 2:6; 'star' is likely from prophecy of Messiah in Num.22 & 24; Gentile magi/kings honor Jesus as king and *worship him* in 2:11)

Jesus begins to retell Israel's story (descent to Egypt and return in 2:13 – 23, fulfilling Hos.11:1 and Num.24:8)

Jesus' baptism (foreshadowing death and resurrection) is God's declaration of Jesus' kingship; God speaks at Jesus' baptism (3:13 – 17)

C. Jesus Overcomes Three Temptations in the Wilderness (4:1 – 11)

D. Jesus Gathers and Prepares the Disciples for Ministry (4:12 – 25)

E. First Major Discourse: Blessings, the New City on a Hill (5:1 – 7:28)

Eight blessings (5:3 – 12) for openness to heart change (5:21 – 7:14)

Jesus calls his disciples' community the new city on a hill, the new presence of God (5:13 – 16)

Ends with the wise and foolish builders, emphasis on obedience to Jesus' word; how great is its fall (7:21 – 29)

F. Jesus Calls to Israel as the Prophet Like Moses (8:1 – 9:34)

Jesus speaks ten words: ten miracles of healing and deliverance (8:1 – 9:34)

Jesus restores people to who they were meant to be, physically (8:1 – 9:34)

Jesus heals two blind men who call him 'Son of David' (9:27 – 31)

Jesus engages and divides Jewish leadership: Pharisees, scribes, synagogue official (9:1 – 13, 18 – 26)

G. Second Major Discourse: Jesus Trains the Disciples to Call More Disciples (9:35 – 11:1)

Jesus sends disciples to Israel in mission, planting households and more disciples (9:35 – 10:42)

H. Jesus as Messiah, for Jews Now and Gentiles Later (11:2 – 12:45)

John the Baptist asks for the identity of Jesus; Jesus answers that he is the Messiah, from Isaiah (11:2 – 6)

Jesus compares Israel unfavorably to Tyre, Sidon, Sodom (11:7 – 24)

Jesus says he is greater than the Temple, and is Lord of the Sabbath, referring to Isaiah (11:25 – 12:21)

Jesus does miracles to attest his identity, Beelzebub controversy (12:22 – 37)

Pharisees demand a sign; Jesus' sign is believing identity: Nineveh, Queen of the South (12:38 – 42)

I. Third Major Discourse: Kingdom Growth as a Household (Mt.12:46 – 13:58)

Jesus is building a household around 'the will of my Father' (12:46 – 50)

Jesus tells parables about the kingdom and the cost of reaching others (13:1 – 51)

Jesus forms his household around his word ('Therefore every scribe...is like a head of a household...'), but is rejected by his human household (13:52 – 58)

H.' Jesus as New Temple Presence of God, for Jews and Gentiles Now (14:1 – 17:27)

John the Baptist is beheaded (14:1 – 12); Jesus answers that he is the Messiah and new Temple (14:13ff.)

Jesus uses Temple bread numbers 5, 7, 12 on mountains as the new Temple of God (14:13 – 15:39)

Jesus denounces Temple corruption, referring to Isaiah (15:1 – 20)

Jesus compares the disciples unfavorably to the Canaanite woman (15:21 – 28)

Pharisees demand a sign; Jesus offers sign of Jonah, reminders of bread miracles (16:1 – 12)

Jesus shows his superiority to the Temple: transfigures his humanity, belittles Temple tax (16:13 – 17:27)

G.' Fourth Major Discourse: Jesus Trains the Disciples to Shepherd Other Disciples (18:1 – 19:2)

Jesus trains his disciples to honor and shepherd new Christians, and extend forgiveness (18:1 – 33)

F.' Jesus Calls to Israel as the Prophet Like Moses and Heir of David (19:3 – 22:46)

Jesus speaks ten words: answers ten questions about the Old Testament from opponents (19:3 – 22:46)

Jesus restores people to who God meant them to be, relationally: marriage, wealth, power (19:3 – 20:28)

Jesus heals two blind men who call him 'Son of David' (20:29 – 34, almost verbatim to 9:27 – 31); 'Son of David' title appears in dense repetition (20:29, 21:9, 21:15, 22:41 – 46)

Jesus engages Israel's leadership in the Temple; they reject him (21:15 – 22:46)

E.' Fifth Major Discourse: Woes, Fall of Jerusalem, the Old City on a Hill (23:1 – 25:46)

Eight woes for lack of heart change (23:1 – 39)

Fall of Jerusalem, the old city on a hill, the old site of the presence of God (24:1 – 51)

Ends with wise and foolish virgins, and emphasis on obedience to his disciples' word (25:1 – 46)

D.' Jesus Prepares His Disciples for His Death (26:1 – 35)

C.' Jesus Overcomes Temptation Three Times in the Garden, Peter Fails Temptation Three Times (26:36 – 75)

B.' Jesus as King, Rejected by Jewish and Gentile Leaders (27:1 – 66)

Resistance from all rulers: the Jewish chief priests and the Roman rulers (27:1ff.)

Jesus' title as 'king' or 'Christ' or 'Son of God' occurs repeatedly (27:11, 17, 22, 37, 42, 43, 54)

Jesus retells Joseph's story, betrayed by Judah for silver into exile (27:1 – 10) and Israel's story, betrayed by sin into exile (27:11 – 54)

Death of Jesus, resurrection of the dead (figure of water baptism); Jesus speaks at his death (27:52 – 53)

A'. Jesus, Israel & the Gentiles, Fulfillment, God With Us (28:1 – 20)

An angel appears, announces fulfillment of what was spoken, 'Just as he said' (28:6) and 'Behold I have told you' (28:7)

Jesus is resurrected and given Adamic authority (cf. Dan.7:13 – 14), meaning God has brought a human back from exile (28:6, 18)

Gentiles included: All are invited and called to Jesus, the heir of David (28:16 – 20)

Immanuel: Lo, I am with you always (28:20)

⁵ Chiastic literary structure developed by Mako A. Nagasawa and Peter K. Kim, last modified August 12, 2015

Power Beyond Our Own: Jesus Goes With Us: Mt.28:20

^{28:20} And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

True, Jesus sends his disciples out into the world. But he does not send us alone. Nor does he simply send us with a good manual. He actually goes with us. Compare the beginning of Matthew's Gospel with the end. At the beginning, Jesus is called 'Immanuel, God with us' (1:23). Now at the end, Jesus enacts what that title means: 'I am with you always' (28:20).

How strange: In Luke, Jesus ascends to the Father and sends his Holy Spirit to empower the disciples. But the presentation in Matthew is different. It seems as if Jesus intends to physically go with his disciples down the mountain and into the world. Matthew simply means what Luke describes in another way. In reality, Jesus does go with us, spiritually. He dwells in us individually. And he is present when two or more are gathered in his name. Mysteriously enough, he is present in the evangelism and discipleship his disciples do, encouraging, directing and empowering us.

Matthew's literary parallel to the Torah reinforces Jesus' presence with us. The ending of Matthew's Gospel parallels but 'improves on' the ending of the Torah. How does the Torah end? With Moses on a mountain, overlooking the land that Israel was going to inherit. Sadly, God stopped Moses from going with the people: God took Moses home, so Moses died on that mountain and Israel had to pursue their inheritance without him (Dt.34). So Israel lost a tremendous leader. Compare that to the end of Matthew's Gospel: Jesus also stands on a mountain, but not to die – in fact, he has already been resurrected. So Jesus' followers aren't going to pursue the inheritance alone – Jesus goes with them. And this time, the inheritance isn't land – it's people. This is a more important battle, led by a vastly more powerful leader.

When I first tried leading a bible study, the summer after my freshman year of college, I was really, really nervous. Before the first meeting, I arrived 30 minutes early to pray, and went to the bathroom three times in that 30 minutes! But even then, I vaguely sensed Jesus leading us. I had gone back home to Los Angeles, CA for the summer and wanted to gather friends and acquaintances to meet with Jesus together in his word. I pitched the idea of studying Matthew 5 – 7, since my mentor David had led me through that section while at school. During the second meeting of that summer study, we were studying Jesus' teaching on anger and reconciliation (Mt.5:21 – 26) and two people reconciled with each other in the meeting. I was stunned. Suddenly I felt like Jesus was there with us.

A transformation started to happen in me as well. I'm still learning that Jesus really is at work around me, that he does things in people that I couldn't foresee, didn't expect, and can't take responsibility for. This was counterintuitive to everything I had learned in life, where effort in equaled results out. Swimming competitively for 10 years and being an engineer by training certainly reinforced that. But with Jesus involved, who can predict anything? Later, in other studies and at other times, I saw people transformed, and it has definitely seemed like Jesus was there with us: some people were healed of physical problems, some people found knowledge they ordinarily wouldn't have, and some people came to Jesus to start a lifelong journey of personal transformation. How does this happen?

Sometimes subtle, sometimes spectacular, yet always significant, Jesus goes with us as we participate in what he's doing. These are his battles – battles for human lives – and every victory is his victory.

Chapter 2: The Historical Background – Israel at the Time of Jesus

The Prequel: The Role of Israel

In order to better understand the Gospel of Matthew, not to mention Jesus himself, we must understand something about Israel, the community from which Jesus came. Indeed, Matthew connects Jesus to Israel's history from the very beginning of his Gospel: 'The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David' (Mt.1:1). Since Matthew writes for a Jewish audience, he introduces Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. **Messiah** (or 'anointed one') was the title of the King who would come from David's line. He would come and rule over both Israel and the Gentile world. He would deliver Israel – or at least, the true and faithful in Israel – from her enemies. He would bring restoration to the world as the good Creator God always intended – in a messianic era with peace and justice. He would bring about 'the happy ending.'

And that gives us the opportunity to back up. Why did God make Israel His 'chosen people'? Why not skip directly to Jesus? Why did Israel hope for a Messiah King, anyway? What's the big deal about a Messiah? Short answers to those big questions are hard, but let's try to answer them.

Israel as God's Chosen People: Chosen to Diagnose and Document the Human Nature Problem

At a basic level, God invited Israel to be His human partner to prepare for His personal coming in Jesus. But more specifically, He set them into an existence so that they would accurately diagnose the human condition, document it in writing, and actually *want* to be transformed by Jesus when he came.

That wasn't an easy task! The first human, Adam had denied his responsibility altogether. Adam's first response was to blame Eve for 'making' him sin. Then Adam blamed God Himself. 'This woman You gave me' (Gen.3). The same blameshifting evasiveness is found in all of us. Two recent books on psychology highlight that: Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson's book *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts* and Cordelia Fine's book *A Mind of Its Own: How Your Brain Distorts and Deceives*. The basic theme of these books: we are really good at deceiving ourselves.

Throughout Israel's long relationship with God, Israel repeatedly failed God. What happened then? They could not blame bad circumstances, since they were in the Promised Land, a 'garden land' much like Adam and Eve's original garden of Eden. Israel could not blame bad laws either, since they had the Law of Moses; the problem was they couldn't live up to it. What explanation was left? Those with insight said the problem was internal, not external, to Israel. Hence, Moses, David, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel said: 'The Lord will circumcise your **heart**' (Dt.30:6). 'Create for me a clean **heart**' (Ps.51:10). God will write His 'law upon their **hearts**' (Jer.31:33). He will 'give you a new **heart**' (Ezk.36:26). In fact, the reason for Israel's subordination to Gentile powers in the first place was Israel's **corrupted human nature**, or, to use the language above, their **hearts**. As we will see in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus agrees with the diagnosis, repeats it (Mt.15:18 – 20), and sets out to heal and transform human nature in every single person: first in himself, and then in others.

Yet if Israel needed the same heart level transformation as the rest of the Gentiles, then the Jews would have to look hard at their past bitter attitudes towards the Gentiles and completely reevaluate what it meant to be 'separate' from them.

Israel as God's Chosen People: Chosen to Hope for a Happy Ending

A second reason God chose Israel was so they could hope for 'a **happy ending**.' Popular historian Thomas Cahill makes a concise comparison between Israel and all the other peoples of the world: 'All evidence points to there having been, in the earliest religious thought, a vision of the cosmos that was profoundly **cyclical**... The Jews were the first people to break out of this circle, to find a new way of thinking and experiencing, a new way of understanding and feeling the world, so much that it may be said with some justice that theirs is the only new idea that human beings have ever had.'⁶

Israel's hope that God would defeat evil developed logically from Israel's assertion that there is only one true God, who is all good and loving. Since there is evil in the world, however, that means this one God must act in a decisive way to defeat evil. And since human beings are the main agent in the world, to overcome humanity's evil God would act through Israel, His human partner, and specifically the heir of King David as His closest human partner. This was Israel's messianic hope. God would not abandon the world or simply let it go on in endless cycles of good and evil. Instead, He would act to save the world from the world's evil. The logical consequence of Israel's monotheism was messianic hope – a happy ending.

Perhaps you or other people you know live in a circular story which just goes around and around forever. Do you think that there are two or more gods of equal power who will keep fighting it out forever (e.g. Zoroastrianism)? Do you think there is one god who is both good and evil where the distinction between good and evil is an illusion in our own heads (e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism)? Do you think there is no god and therefore no ability to change human nature or escape the endless cycles of conflict (e.g. atheism)?

Perhaps you want to live in a story with a happy ending but you're not sure why the story ends up that way. Every story with a happy ending must overcome the fundamental problem to reach that happy ending. But if the problem in your story is external to humanity, then why haven't we figured out what to fix? For example, Western Enlightenment modernists and neo-conservatives believe the problem is 'lack of democracy,' an external problem that we can fix. But is that true? Why then were the great liberal democracies (France, Germany, Britain, U.S.) uniformly racist? Why was racial segregation maintained by democratic means in the U.S.? Why was Hitler democratically elected? Or Hezbollah?

We can go on and on about issues external to humanity: better schools, better environments, better families, etc. Don't get me wrong – those are important tasks to shoot for. But what if the problem is *internal* to humanity? What if *we* are the problem? That is the deeper opinion voiced in the Old Testament, and Jesus says later in Matthew's Gospel, 'Out of the heart comes evil...' (Mt.15:18). Then the Messiah, Jesus, must also be God's human agent to undo the evil *in* humanity. We are the problem that must be overcome in order to reach the messianic happy ending. That must be Jesus' role and destiny! Indeed, we'll see that in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection where he becomes a fresh, new kind of human being, physically saturated by the love and glory of God.

⁶ Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (Thorndike, ME: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p.13 – 14

Israel During the Time of Jesus

Sadly, the Israelites sinned and turned their backs on God. Their leaders broke God's law by amassing wealth in Jerusalem at the people's expense, which drew the greed of foreign powers (e.g. 1 Ki.12; Isa.39). Israel's reliance on those powers was a further sin, which drew them into being conquered. After the kingdom divided into the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel, the Assyrian Empire took over the northern kingdom in 721 BC. The Neo-Babylonian Empire conquered Judah and Jerusalem and took Jews captive in 586 BC (discussed by the book of Daniel). The Medo-Persian Empire conquered Babylon, and Cyrus the Great permitted the return of many Jews to the traditional homeland of Israel (described in 2 Chr.36 and the book of Ezra-Nehemiah). The Greek Empire, led by Alexander the Great, displaced Persian authority in the region, establishing the Greek language and culture throughout but provoking cultural resistance from the Jews.



The Roman Empire succeeded the Greeks. In Roman eyes, Israel was part of a string of valuable buffer states between the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire (see map). At the time of Jesus, Pontius Pilate ruled as the Roman procurator of Judea. The Romans installed as a client king an Edomite named Herod; despite practicing Judaism, King Herod and his sons were rejected by the observant and nationalist Jews of Judea because he was not of the royal line of David.

Every Passover, devout Jews would pray that they had no king but God. Passover was for the Jews what the Fourth of July is for Americans: a celebration of independence. This annual feast commemorated the day God liberated Israel out from Egypt in the days of Moses. But the bitter irony of celebrating Passover under Roman occupation was the reminder that Israel was not free. They were not free from their sins nor from their Gentile captors. Israel did consolidate her Scriptures, what we now call the Old Testament. Yet questions abounded about

whether there would really be a Messiah, whether Israel’s sins were preventing the Messiah from coming, whether the Messiah would come and then cleanse Israel, etc.

How Jews Felt About Each Other: Cultures and Politics

By the time Jesus was born, Diaspora Jews remained scattered throughout the world, and the Hebraic Jews living in the land of Judea were fragmented into various camps. This chart, borrowed from sociologists Kitano and Daniels to describe how ethnic minorities relate to a dominant culture, gives a general sense for what those camps were. You will meet all of these characters as you read through the Gospel of Matthew. *This chart will also help you understand how we can build and participate in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural ministry.*

<p>High Identification with Jewish covenant</p>	<p>The Essenes in the Dead Sea region defined Jewishness around physical separateness and waiting for the Temple to be cleansed.</p> <p>Revolutionary zealots defined Jewishness around a military Messianic hope of liberating Jerusalem from Rome and restoring the corrupt Temple.</p> <p>The Pharisees, lawyers, and scribes defined Jewishness around aspects of the Mosaic Law (Sabbath-keeping, ritual purity, kosher laws). Many believed Israel to be an ethnicity, by genetic descent from Abraham.</p>	<p>The priests kept up the Jerusalem Temple’s sacrificial system but had to work the Roman system to do so. They benefited financially.</p> <p>Other Jews (Essenes, revolutionaries, Pharisees, scribes) saw them as collaborators and contaminated.</p>
<p>Low Identification with Jewish covenant</p>	<p>The Samaritans were half-Jewish and half-Assyrian and were rejected by mainstream Jewish society. They were not allowed to worship in Jerusalem.</p> <p>The sinners, prostitutes, and outcasts were not welcomed into the synagogue and mainstream Jewish society for what were perceived as their moral failures.</p>	<p>The Sadducees changed their beliefs about resurrection and made political alliances with Rome for land.</p> <p>The tax collectors became part of the Roman taxation machinery and were seen as traitors to the Jewish nation.</p>
	<p>Low Assimilation with Greco-Roman culture</p>	<p>High Assimilation with Greco-Roman culture</p>

Military Messianic Movements in Israel 163 BCE – 135 CE

To give you a sense for how fervently many Jews hoped in a military Messiah who would liberate Jerusalem from the Romans, cleanse the Jerusalem Temple to renew worship, and oust the enemies of Israel, here is a list of revolutionary movements. These movements called

themselves ‘messianic.’⁷ This will help you understand not only what the disciples also thought of Jesus initially, but also how Pharisees and zealots often made common cause. *Knowing this will help you pose a very important apologetics question, and answer it: How do you explain why the earliest Christians started to love their Roman enemies, instead of wanting to kill them?*

- 163 BCE: Judas Maccabeus recaptured Jerusalem from the Greek Seleucid Empire and cleansed the Temple, providing the model for a Jewish resistance tradition
- 40 BCE: Hezekiah led revolts and skirmishes. He was put down by Herod the Great. Samaia the Pharisee objected to this.
- 4 BCE: Young men, as Herod lay dying in 4 BCE, pulled down Roman eagles from Jerusalem, who were then killed on Herod’s orders. They were supported by the teachers Judas ben Sariphaeus and Matthias ben Margalothus (*War* 1.648 – 55; *Ant.* 17.149-66). The young men who were egged on by the teachers Judas and Matthias to pull down Roman eagles from Jerusalem, were then killed on Herod’s orders (*War* 1.648 – 55; *Ant.* 17.149 – 66).
- 3BCE: There was another violent revolt on the following Passover, which was renewed at Pentecost (*War* 2.1 – 13; 39 – 50; *Ant.* 17.206 – 18; 250 – 64). Josephus says that it involved ‘a countless multitude’ from all over Palestine, especially Judea itself. They laid siege to the Romans, fought them, and besieged the commander himself in the palace. At this, anarchy broke out in Palestine (*War* 2.55; *Ant.* 17.269, referring to ‘continuous and countless new tumults’), including a revolt by Herod’s veterans and one by Judas, son of Hezekiah.
- 6 CE: Judas the Galilean (*War* 2.118, also probably ‘Theudas’ mentioned in Acts 5:37), who may have been the same person as Judas the son of Hezekiah the bandit leader.⁸ Judas, together with Zadok, a Pharisee, headed a large number of Zealots and offered strenuous resistance. Judas proclaimed the Jewish state as a republic recognizing God alone as king and ruler and His laws as supreme. The revolt continued to spread, and in some places serious conflicts ensued.
- An individual called the ‘Samaritan’ led a group of armed followers and ended up in guerilla warfare. Precise date unknown.
- The unnamed prophets of *War* 2.258 – 60/*Ant.* 20.167b – 8 were part of the general brigandage noted in *Ant.* 20.167a. Precise date unknown.
- The ‘Egyptian’, according to *War* 2.262, intended to force entry to Jerusalem, overpower the Roman garrison, and set himself up as a tyrant. Precise date unknown.
- The unnamed prophet of *Ant.* 20.188 appeared in the context of widespread brigandry (since some ‘prophets’ and their followers entertained dreams of violent revolution). Precise date unknown.
- Jonathan the Weaver (*War* 7.437 – 50), according to Josephus’ *Life* 424f., aroused an uprising in Galilee. Precise date unknown.
- ~28 CE: Pontius Pilate crushed upstart Galileans, mingling their blood with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1)
- 30 CE: Barabbas, and the revolt in which he took part (Luke 23.19; in John 18.40 Barabbas is described as a lestes, ‘brigand’). Presumably the two *lestai* crucified alongside Jesus count as well.

⁷ This data is distilled from N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), p.170 – 203. I have preserved references to Josephus’ two works *Antiquities of the Jews* and *Wars of the Jews*.

⁸ see N.T. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, p.180

- 40's CE: The sons of Judas the Galilean, Jacob/James and Simon (*Ant.* 20.102), continued their father's insurrection. They were crucified in the late 40s by Roman governor Tiberius Julius Alexander.
- All the 'common people' were punished along with Eleazor ben Deinaeus; in *War* 2.253, Josephus says the number of them was 'incalculable'.
- Jesus ben Ananias entered Jerusalem on the Feast of Sukkot and decried the Temple; the governor interrogated him but later released him.
- There are the further outbreaks of brigandage reported in *War* 2.264f.; these may be the same ones who are mentioned in 2.271, but in the earlier passage it appears that the revolutionary fervor was far more widespread than a small group.
- 66 CE: The Sicarii, the 'dagger men,' led by Menahem, another son or grandson of Judas the Galilean (*War* 4.198, *Ant.* 20.186f., etc.) forced their way into the Temple and then burned the houses of Ananias, Agrippa, and Bernice, and the Record Office with the records of debt. Menaham broke into the armory at Masada, distributed arms, and returned to Jerusalem as 'king' over the revolutionary forces.
- 66 – 70 CE: Simon bar Giora was captured after the revolt of 66 – 70 and brought to Rome. He was executed in Rome in 71.
- 67 – 70 CE: John of Gischala and his followers came from Galilee to Jerusalem to participate in the revolt. John was captured at the end of the war and condemned to life imprisonment (*War* 2.590 – 632).
- 73 CE: Eleazar ben Yair, possibly the same person as Eleazar ben Simon, led a Sicarii rebellion at Masada. The size and scope of the group is disputed, as is the manner of their death; possibly it was mass suicide.
- 132 – 135 CE: Finally, there was the Jewish military leader known as Bar-Kochba and his Jewish uprising of 135 AD which was finally crushed at Masada. This ended the period of Jewish militancy.

Needless to say, Jesus' own definition of the problem, as well as its solution, were quite different than all this. This background will help you understand why Jesus wanted to draw a following and be identified as the Messiah by his disciples (for example, Matthew 16:13 – 28), but expressed real hesitation early on with being very public about it. During the last week of his life, however, Jesus marched into Jerusalem openly claiming to be the Messiah, the king of the Jews. This is described in Matthew 21 and following. The explanation for Jesus' earlier secrecy is to avoid stirring up the militant interpretation of the Messiah that many Jews held.

Chapter 3: Study Notes and Leader’s Guide for Matthew 3 – 7

The following passages are part of the first literary section of Matthew, which goes from Mt.1:1 to 7:29. For the purposes of campus ministry, I typically start with the story of the baptism and wilderness temptation of Jesus in Mt.3:13 – 4:11. This passage is fundamental:

- To understanding Jesus as the one who heals human evil at its source: in human nature
- To learning how to articulate the evangelistic significance of Jesus to every person
- To understanding the Bible as a story with repeated patterns, and studying it well
- To understanding the basic nature of temptation and spiritual warfare
- To giving a mentor and mentee a chance to share their personal stories of being transformed by Jesus
- To fostering a context where we expect Jesus to transform us

I will give a high level overview of the passages, and why each is important.

1	Matthew 3:13 – 4:11	Jesus Retells Our Story
2	Matthew 4:12 – 25	Jesus Calls Us to Call Others
3	Matthew 5:1 – 12	Spiritual Transformation
4	Matthew 5:13 – 16	Spiritual Influence
5	Matthew 5:21 – 26	Heart Transformation for Reconciliation
6	Matthew 5:27 – 32	Heart Transformation for Purity
7	Matthew 5:33 – 37	Heart Transformation for Integrity
8	Matthew 5:38 – 48	Heart Transformation for Love
9	Matthew 6:1 – 18	From Public Show to Deep Authenticity
10	Matthew 6:19 – 34	From Greed to Generosity
11	Matthew 7:1 – 6	From Judging to Healing
12	Matthew 7:7 – 29	The Great Choice

For the Leader: Your mentee will receive a Participant’s Guide with all the materials in the Leader’s Guide, except for the leader’s questions and notes.

Jesus Retells Our Story

Matthew 3:13 – 4:11

^{3:13} Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ But John tried to prevent him, saying, ‘I have need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ ¹⁵ But Jesus answering said to him, ‘Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he permitted him. ¹⁶ After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on him, ¹⁷ and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.’ ^{4:1} Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he then became hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ ⁴ But he answered and said, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’’ ⁵ Then the devil took him into the holy city and had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you’; and ‘on their hand they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’’ ⁷ Jesus said to him, ‘On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.’’ ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; ⁹ and he said to him, ‘All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.’ ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and serve Him only.’’ ¹¹ Then the devil left him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to him.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Baptism:* Baptism was a rite of passage for Gentile *converts into Judaism*. It represented God cleansing a person from sin through that person’s repentance, and new birth as a new person into Israel, the community of God’s people. Baptism was based on an Old Testament pattern. Notice:

Adam and Eve	Noah & Family	Israel
Gen.1:2 the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters ... ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (God then placed humanity in a garden land .)	Gen.7:24 The water prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days. ^{8:1} But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided. (Noah then planted a garden .)	Ex.14:29 But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians... (Israel was in the wilderness for 40 years until God placed them in the garden land .)

- *John the Baptist:* Therefore, John, the ‘herald’ of Jesus, was making a fairly radical statement by calling for *Jews* to be baptized.

Questions

1. What do you think this whole experience was like for Jesus? Gather ideas, impressions.
2. What is Jesus communicating through the symbol of baptism?
 - a. He's becoming God's true human being. Everyone else before him failed.
 - b. First, the surprising thing is that John the Baptist is baptizing Jews. Why? He was supposed to be baptizing Gentiles only! To say that Jews needed to be baptized, too, was radical. The second surprising thing is that Jesus gets baptized. Why did Jesus get baptized? What did it mean to 'fulfill all righteousness' (3:15)? Did he have sin to confess and repent of?
 - c. Jesus did not have sinful actions or thoughts of his own, but Jesus took on the same human nature we have, which was a corrupted human nature. Jesus needed to confess the sinfulness of that human nature.
 - i. As we see in 4:1 – 11, Jesus will be tempted by the devil. What does it mean that Jesus was tempted? Temptation is a force that exists between something external to us and something internal to us. I am tempted by chocolate and other desserts. But if I didn't desire them, then you could put pies, cookies, chocolate, and ice cream in front of me and it would have no effect. So for Jesus to be tempted means that he has something in his human nature that wants to sin and is fighting his divine nature.
 - d. Jesus was cleansing his human nature and transforming it all the way through his life, death, and resurrection, so he could share his new human nature to be shared with us for our sakes.
 - e. Jesus is symbolizing his own death and resurrection. He is looking ahead to that, and being prepared for it. He is going to offer us salvation from ourselves by giving us himself!
3. Here's a comparison of ways that different belief systems have of dealing with human evil
 - a. Change external circumstances, make better laws, let each person work off the evil (through good deeds): (Rabbinic Judaism, Islam, Mormonism)
 - b. Get used to the evil out there, suppress your desires (Hinduism, Zen Buddhism)
 - c. Transform human nature itself and then offer people a new, fresh, purified humanity. Only with Jesus do we see God someone actually transforming human nature itself. Let's see how God does this.
4. What happens to Jesus when he gets baptized?
 - a. Jesus was receiving the Holy Spirit for us! He was adjusting his humanity to make it fit for the Spirit to dwell in, so he could share his new humanity with us.
 - b. The Father affirms Jesus' identity as his Son.
 - c. Who else do we allow to tell us who we are? Lots of people! And that's the problem. But Jesus is receiving the Father's word into his humanity for our sake. He's going to share his new humanity with us after his death and resurrection.
 - d. Why is it important to receive our identity from the Father by being in Jesus?
 - e. What else could the Father have said to Jesus? I mean, if you're seeing your kids off to school, you give them a pep talk or some advice. This was the start of Jesus' ministry, and he would immediately go through a really big challenge. Why does the Father say this??? This will be answered later.
5. Why does the Spirit lead Jesus into *the wilderness*?
 - a. What happened in the wilderness before? Israel had been there, too, for 40 years, after being 'baptized' in the Red Sea. So the wilderness was part of Israel's foundational story. Notice that Jesus quotes *exclusively* from Deuteronomy, so we know he's thinking about that part of Israel's story. (Moses gave Deuteronomy to Israel while they were all wandering in the wilderness.)
 - b. What is the U.S. foundational story? What if Jesus sailed from England to Plymouth, MA on a ship called the Mayflower and started to deal kindly with the Native Americans (who are still there today)? If he intended to redo the U.S. but undo its sin, that's what he would do.
 - c. MAJOR POINT: So Jesus is redoing Israel's foundational story but undoing its sin. Jesus is the 'new Israel' who was going to succeed where Israel failed.
 - i. Illus: When Jesus came into my life, he began to re-tell my story and re-live my story to undo patterns of sin in my life. The most powerful instance of this was during the summer after my junior year of college. That was the time my parents finally decided to get their divorce. My dad's drinking had escalated to an alarming place. Now my way of dealing with my family, ever since 10th grade, was to leave. After I got my driver's license and my car keys, I was out of there. I'd go over to a park or to a friend's place to

distract myself. I didn't even have a thought for my younger sister, who was four years younger than me, who I left at home to deal with the mess I didn't want to deal with. But that summer, I felt Jesus say to me, 'I want you to stay.' I said to him, 'I don't have the strength to do that. If what you said is true, Jesus, then you need to be here in me, living your life out through me.' And he did. My parents couldn't afford a lawyer, so they had me arbitrate who gets what. I remember going into that time saying, 'I can't do this!' But during that time, Jesus filled me with a sense of his love for me. And he gave me his love for my parents. I was able to listen sensitively to both of them. In fact, every other time before that, my response to them was, 'You have to stay together – for my sake' or 'You have to get a divorce – for my sake.' But I had never considered it for their sakes. Jesus helped me separate myself from my parents' marriage so they could make a decision that was best for them. Jesus gave me his love for my parents. He gave me his strength to stay at home. He gave me insights so I could counsel my sister with what she was feeling. At the end of that summer, I was talking to my friend Malcolm, whose family had gone through a similar thing earlier. I told him what I was experiencing and how I was meeting Jesus throughout it all, and he said these words to me that I'll never forget: 'Mako, how can you be so other-centered at a time like this?' I treasure those words as a reminder to me of the difference Jesus makes.

- ii. Illus: Somehow, we know that in all good stories, the happy ending doesn't just come out of nowhere. It replays the mess ups people had done before. Like with Anakin and Luke Skywalker. How many of you are Star Wars fans? Do you notice that Luke repeats motifs from his father Anakin's life. In Anakin's duel with Count Dooku, Anakin loses his green lightsaber, but he also has Obi-Wan Kenobi's blue lightsaber. During the fight, a power cord is cut, which turns the lights off. So Anakin and Dooku fight in a blue and red lightsaber duel, with blue and red lights reflected in their faces. In that duel, young Anakin loses his right hand. Of course, Anakin later chooses the dark side and becomes Darth Vader. Luke Skywalker replays his father Anakin's story, but redeems it. He has a blue lightsaber, and with it fights Darth Vader, who now has a red lightsaber. So Luke and Darth Vader fight in a blue and red lightsaber duel, with blue and red lights reflected on their faces. They are in a dark room, and replay the same moves that Anakin and Dooku did. In that duel, young Luke Skywalker loses his right hand. So the stories parallel each other. But Luke later does not choose the dark side. He stays on the good side of the force and redeems his father, yes, but also his father's story. The victory echoed the defeats of the past, but reversed them.
- iii. Illus: The Red Sox have a lot of history like that. The Red Sox won the World Series in 1916 and 1918, and then traded Babe Ruth to the NY Yankees in 1920. They didn't win another championship for 86 years. It was called 'the curse of the Bambino', i.e. Babe Ruth, and it seemed true. How many of you know that sad story? Whenever the Red Sox went to either the American League championship or the World Series, they lost through some weird fluke, each time. In 1975, the Sox lost to the Cincinnati Reds in game 7, in the 9th inning, after being ahead 3-0. In 1986, the Sox lost the American League playoff to the Mets. In game 6, Bill Buckner just had to catch the ball and throw it to home, but he let the ball go through his legs, and the Mets scored the winning run. They lost that game, then lost the next game and lost the World Series. In 2003, in the American League championship, the Sox were beating the Yankees in the 8th inning of game 7. They were up 5-2. But the Yankees won in the 9th 6 – 5. It did seem like the Red Sox were just cursed. No matter how well they did, something tragic always happened. But in 2004, as we all know, the Red Sox won the World Series. But they didn't just win, they won in such a way that they replayed many of the past events but redeemed them. They beat the Yankees, their arch-rivals, for the American League Championship after the Yankees had already won 3 games. And the amazing thing is that NO ONE has ever come back to win 4 straight games after losing the first 3. Curt Schilling pitched on a bleeding ankle because he had torn sutures because he had torn tendons. And in the World Series, the Red Sox beat the St. Louis Cardinals in 4 straight games. To add a surreal touch to the World Series victory, there was a total lunar eclipse that colored the

moon a deep red color. The moon was red when the Red Sox won the World Series at last. The victory echoed the defeats of the past, but reversed them.

- iv. Happy endings don't come out of nowhere – they repair the failures of the past. Adam's race brought evil into the world. Adam's race will help to heal it. Why does it work that way? – Because God is committed to working inside the story. Not from outside it, because He would then overrule humanity's place in the story. He is so committed to us, in love and justice, that this is the way He brings it about. PRACTICAL Application: How do you think Jesus would re-live your life story with you, and heal you and transform you?
6. What is the devil's strategy? To get Jesus to doubt his identity.
- a. Is there really a devil? A personal incarnation of evil? Well, although it's hard for skeptical people in the West to believe that, the rest of the world believes in a spiritual realm and definitely evil spiritual beings. Adam and Eve, as the original rulers of creation, allowed the serpent (the devil) to be influential in the world through their own sin.
 - b. How does the devil taunt Jesus to prove his identity? The 1st and 2nd times. On the 3rd time, he just makes a naked power offer. Of course, if Jesus accepted that, he would have become a 'son of Satan.'
 - c. What's the big deal about turning stone to bread? Why didn't Jesus just do that?
 - i. It would have been an act of power simply for himself, as opposed to what the Father wants for others.
 - ii. It would have opened a landslide into having Satan define the terms of Jesus' faith in God. Satan is trying to instill doubt into Jesus, that God's declaration can't be trusted on its own. Thus, Jesus should feel the need to prove it over and over again. One of those days, there would be disappointment. So instead, Jesus says, 'man lives on every word that falls from the mouth of God.' The last words he had heard from God were the words at his baptism about his identity!!
 - d. DISCUSS: Where do you find your sense of identity? Accomplishments? Relationships? It's easy to feel like the Father's voice is not very affirming ('isn't He mean?!'), so we look around for other affirmation. If we don't receive our identity from God by relying on Jesus do that for us, we will basically run around asking other people to tell us who we are. *This is what leads to us making the same mistakes over and over.*
 - e. MAJOR POINT: Why does Jesus struggle? Is he really tempted? By what? His own humanity, the self-centered humanity that he was wearing, wanted to be self-centered. But Jesus refused it.
 - i. I've often wondered what that was like for him. We have very little idea what it means to resist the evil and self-centeredness within ourselves, because we give into that self-centeredness fairly early on. Like how many of you guys are virgins not because you've resisted temptation, or is it just because you've not had the opportunity? That's the difference here. Like how many of you choose not to go shopping when it's offered you, and instead, give that money to children in poverty'? The only way we know how strong our own evil is, is to resist it. And the longer we resist it, the more we feel it. If you read the saints of the past, they were really aware of their self-centeredness because they were pushing so hard against it. We're not really aware of our self-centeredness because we pamper ourselves so quickly. We eat when we want, change the channel when we want, customize our play list and our shopping list to our comfort. We have no idea how evil we can be because we protect ourselves from it.
 - ii. Do you believe that Jesus' human nature craved sin? Sex? Physical comfort? Bitter anger against the Romans for oppressing his people? Revenge? Do you believe that Jesus had a mind like ours, which wanted to think private thoughts apart from God? But he always, always did one thing. When his own human nature wanted to just have an easy life, Jesus said, 'No, my life belongs to God.' When his own humanity wanted to lash out at his enemies, Jesus said, 'No, my life belongs to God.' When his own humanity wanted to sin, Jesus said, 'No. I belong to God.' He constantly took his own humanity and redirected it to God, to receive the love of God to the fullest, to love God absolutely. Jesus was healing human nature, the human nature he had taken on.
 - iii. Here's an analogy: The closer the Ring got to Mordor, the stronger it became. It became heavier on Frodo. It put fear and hate in his mind. It poisoned him. We don't know the

real power of selfishness, because we give into it fairly early on. And the only way to know the power of our own selfishness is to resist it. Jesus resisted it, every moment, all the way to the end. And Jesus couldn't just put it down. It was part of him.

7. Possible Applications

- a. (for non-Christians) How else do you think the corruption in human nature can be dealt with, except through Jesus?
- b. When we are tempted, it is usually because we are listening to other voices than the Father's. What other voices are very influential to us? How can we let the Father define us more?
- c. (for Christians) If we are in Jesus, then Jesus makes the affirmation the Father gives him to us, so that the Father says, 'This is My daughter' or 'This is My Son' 'in whom I am well-pleased. What would help us hear and understand the Father's affirmation better?
- d. (for Christians) When it comes to Christian leadership and ministry, which is coming up next for us in the coming sessions, it's really important to have your identity in Jesus. Because you'll confront failure, disappointment, success, etc. and you'll be tempted to find your identity in your effectiveness (or lack thereof) instead of your identity in Christ. But to be steady and strong, you've got to know your identity in Christ above all else. Notice Jesus said in Luke 10:20, 'Nevertheless do not rejoice in this [ministry success], that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.'
- e. (for Christians) Look at the New Humanity evangelism diagram. Check the table of contents of this booklet to find it near the end of this workbook.

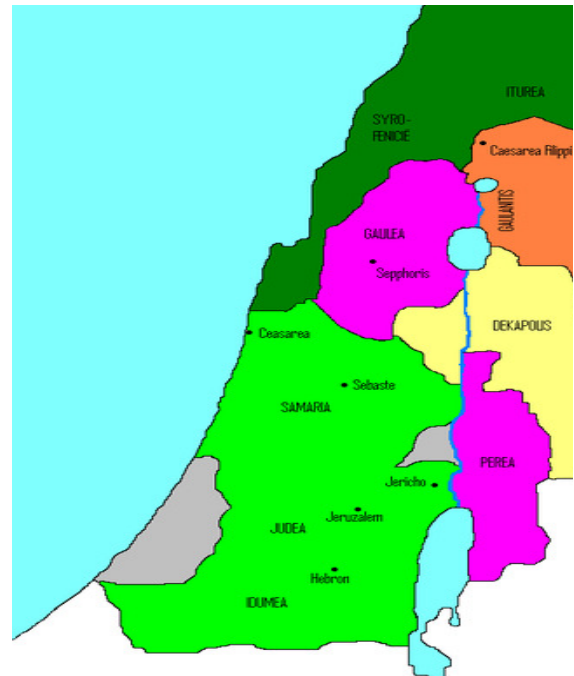
Jesus Calls Us to Call Others

Matthew 4:12 – 25

^{4:12} Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, he withdrew into Galilee; ¹³ and leaving Nazareth, he came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴ This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ¹⁵ ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – ¹⁶ the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned.’ ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ¹⁸ Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ Going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. ²³ Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. ²⁴ The news about him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and he healed them. ²⁵ Large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel’s Exile:* Long ago, in 721 BC, the Assyrian Empire had taken over the northern Galilee section of Israel and Samaria starting with ‘the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.’ The prophet Isaiah (quoted in Mt.4:15 – 16) had foretold that that land, first to be conquered, would be the first to see the light dawning on Israel. Since the Babylonian takeover in 586 BC, all the Jews had been ruled by a foreign power.
- *Herod:* The non-Jewish ruler Herod Antipas had taken John the Baptist (Jesus’ cousin and predecessor) into custody because John criticized his adulterous marriage (Mt.14:1 – 12). Herod’s territory was in purple on the map (right), marked ‘Galilea’ and ‘Perea.’ Hence, Jesus began his ministry in a dangerous region politically.
- *Messiah:* Almost all Jews hoped for a military Messiah (which meant ‘anointed one’) to oust the Romans, inaugurating the ‘kingdom of heaven/God’ in a new sort of ‘independence day.’



Questions

1. Select one of the two approaches:
 - a. (directed question) What do we learn about Jesus as he calls people into his mission?
 - b. (open-ended) What questions do you have about this passage? (hopefully, they match with the questions below somewhat)
2. Why does Jesus start in the Galilee area?
 - a. He's courting danger! He starts in the region under the governance of Herod Antipas, who didn't like John the Baptist for telling him the truth about his lifestyle.
 - b. Because Jesus wants to heal people who lived in the region where destruction first entered Israel.
 - c. On the theme of Jesus retelling our stories, this is significant. God, through Jesus, heals sin in a certain order. Jesus is now healing Israel in the place where Israel's sin had the first major consequence, the Assyrian invasion.
 - d. Illus: Leader share a personal story about how Jesus starts to undo our sinful tendencies
3. What is Jesus' preaching? What is this kingdom of heaven?
 - a. A kingdom is made of a King and subjects. Note: v.23 uses the word 'gospel' or 'good news' (euangelion). But the euangelion ('good news') was also a political proclamation of the Roman Empire that a new Emperor had been born or had ascended the throne. That was the 'good news' of Rome. Here, Jesus announces 'good news' in the midst of another kingdom.
 - b. In the passage, what signs are there that a kingdom is breaking forth? Followers, for one. Miracles demonstrating Jesus' power over evil, suffering, demons.
 - c. What is Jesus fighting? Disease, human brokenness, demons, evil.
 - d. PRACTICAL Application: What are the aspects of darkness (figuratively) we face here in our culture?
 - i. Illus: In my role as an IVCF staff worker at Boston College, I've watched students follow Jesus into throwing alternative fun events. The areas of darkness they are engaging with are issues of loneliness and alcoholism, since BC has a lot of alcohol-based parties. At times, I've given them up to \$50 in 'venture capital fun money' to spend on non-alcoholic things: a cheesecake baking party, an Asian shaved ice dessert night, a movie and games night, an 'Amazing Race' series on campus. We've even invited non-Christian seekers to help organize these events with us. Much like Levi the tax collector throwing a party so that Jesus could meet his tax-collector buddies, we throw these parties so people could glimpse Jesus.
 - ii. Notice that Jesus calls people into **ACTIVITY WITH HIM**. Not just activity, constantly – there is rest and prayer and all kinds of other things too. But Jesus does not call his disciples to sit in a pew, or sit in a coffee shop... listen... talk... and *maybe* do something. He calls them straight into **ACTIVITY WITH HIM**. I've also called people – including non-Christians – straight into Global Poverty Impact groups (learning about how to give money to the global poor) or into manning a large interactive display on campus on race, or evil, or some other issue.
 - iii. So, what are the things that damage us? Eating disorders, loneliness, being totally stressed out, greed, injustice, etc.? Jesus is engaging those issues all the time. Where do you sense his heart for people?
4. How do you think Jesus looks at the people who 'sat in darkness'? The people with all the diseases and demonic problems?
 - a. Illus: If you've ever had someone you love get sick or hurt, or even a pet get sick or hurt, how did that feel? Can you kind of understand how Jesus felt towards his people?
 - b. Illus: Remember the scene from X-Men Origins: Wolverine where Wolverine sees all the mutants locked up in cages in William Striker's lab? He gets mad about how they are being treated, so he breaks them all out.
 - c. What do you think Jesus felt about things not being right? The people were vulnerable, they had lost a hero in John the Baptist, they were affected by their own sin, and they were separated from God. So he starts to free them from things.
 - d. Jesus is not afraid of the places of brokenness in our lives. He is drawn like a moth to the fire to those places, in fact.
5. Why does Jesus call people to repent?

- a. What is repentance? A turning from one to another, a switching of sides. It doesn't mean 'to grovel.' To repent is to turn from everything else and follow Jesus!
- b. They needed to approach him as king. That's what no one had done yet. This is not just about behavior modification, or a social program. Jesus is establishing a relationship where he is king and we are subjects. Do we believe this?
- c. The following comparison might be helpful, if you have people who have a 'get people from heaven to earth' perspective on Christian faith:

	Get people from earth to heaven	Bring heaven to earth through people
Is heaven mainly a future or present reality?	Future	Present
What does Jesus do with our sin?	He forgives it	He forgives it, but also calls us to repent from it
What is evangelism?	Proclaiming Jesus as Savior	Proclaiming Jesus as Lord (Can Jesus be Savior but not Lord?)
This tends to lead Christians to do...what?	Attend a church?	Apprenticeship

6. Following Jesus: What do you think of Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John's very abrupt decision to follow Jesus?
 - a. What are they leaving behind?
 - i. Fishing was not a 'minimum wage job.' They were leaving behind decent jobs, and their fathers who taught them to fish.
 - ii. What do you think they are hoping for?
 - b. If someone announced on campus that a new campus government and administration was at hand, would you listen to it? What if you knew it was going to be way better, with a better dining plan, better housing, etc. Or that in our country, a new federal government was at hand, would you believe it? Would you live in the old reality or the new?
 - c. What do they know at this point? That something very exciting is happening. And that they are being called to be 'fishers of men.' What does that mean to them? Influence in drawing others to Jesus, a role to play in this kingdom, etc.
 - d. Even if you are not a Christian, one way to get to know Jesus is to partner with him in what he's doing. Can you help us organize a fun event as a way to care about other people? Can you go with us to meet homeless people in Boston Common one Saturday? Then as we reflect on what we learn about loving others in partnership with Jesus, we will get to know him better.
Application: Consider partnering with us to love people.
 - e. Application: What is it that keeps you from following Jesus?
7. What does it mean to be 'fishers of men'?
 - a. Not merely ATTENDANCE: Pew-sitting? 'Going to church on Sunday'? Spectating? Or an individualized piety alone?
 - b. APPRENTICESHIP. That we are involved evangelistically with drawing people into this kingdom, to meet Jesus as King. We are not passive recipients and spectators. We become active vessels of Jesus' activity. From here, Jesus is training his disciples in what to say and how to act. Then he will launch them into activity of their own in Matthew 10.
 - c. Application: Just as fishers of fish go to where the fish are, fishers of people go to where the people are. Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John understood that, as fishermen, they had to go out into the lake and let down their nets. They couldn't just expect fish to come to them. Similarly, part of Jesus' intention is to bring them to fish where people are. Pray that God would give you the strength, courage, and love to go to the places of darkness and need to find the people Jesus wants to call to himself.

Spiritual Transformation

Matthew 5:1 – 12

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² He opened his mouth and began to teach them, saying,

³ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel's Exile*: The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- *The Kingdom of God*: The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called 'the kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God'. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans. Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human nature, which he had to accomplish first in himself (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), and then in his followers. Jesus had just announced 'the kingdom of heaven' (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations.
- *Jesus' Authority*: The fact that Jesus sits down (5:1 – 2) is significant. Rabbis sat down to deliver their most important teachings.
- *The Beatitudes*: The beatitudes (5:3 – 12): they are a distillation of Old Testament hope, in particular as the OT anticipated the Messiah and the new covenant. Jesus is now gathering up all the prophetic expectations together and placing himself and his movement squarely within them, expressing them, fulfilling them.

Guiding Questions

1. Who does God bless in the kingdom? How?
2. Is Jesus describing eight different people (blessed x8) or one person?
3. What does this tell us about the character of this God?

Matthew 5:1 – 12 Old Testament Background (Optional Examples)

Jesus	Fulfills the Old Testament Hope for Renewal	
<p>³ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p>	<p>Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. Where then is the house you will build for me? And where is a place I may rest? For my hand made all these things. Thus all these things came into being, declares the Lord. But to this one I will look, to the one who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at my word. (Isa.66:1 – 2)</p>	
<p>⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.</p>	<p>The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn (Isa.61:1 – 2)</p>	
<p>⁵ Blessed are the <i>humble/meek</i>, for they shall inherit the earth.</p>	<p>But the <i>humble/meek</i> will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. (Ps.37:11, 22, 29) But he who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land (Isa.57:13) Enlarge the place of your tent; stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not; lengthen your cords and strengthen your pegs. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left. And your descendants will possess nations and will resettle the desolate cities. (Isa.54:2 – 3)</p>	
<p>⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.</p>	<p>Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David. (Isa.55:1 – 3)</p>	
<p>⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.</p>	<p>The merciful man does himself good, but the cruel man does himself harm. (Prov.11:17)</p>	
<p>⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.</p>	<p>Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. (Ps.24:3 – 4)</p> <p>But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD, I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jer.31:33)</p>	
<p>⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.</p>	<p>I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners, creating the praise of the lips. Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near. (Isa.57:18 – 19)</p>	
<p>¹⁰ Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>¹¹ Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.</p> <p>¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</p>	<p>e.g. Elijah (1 Kings 21), Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.</p>	

Matthew 5:1 – 12 Old Testament Background (Optional Example from Isaiah)

Old Testament Hopes for Renewal...	...Are Inaugurated by Jesus
<p>Example passage: Isaiah 57:12 – 21</p> <p>¹² “I will declare your righteousness and your deeds; But they will not profit you.</p> <p>¹³ When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you. But the wind will carry all of them up, And a breath will take them away. But he who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land And will possess My holy mountain.”</p> <p>¹⁴ And it will be said, “Build up, build up, prepare the way, Remove every obstacle out of the way of My people.”</p> <p>¹⁵ For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.</p> <p>¹⁶ For I will not contend forever, Nor will I always be angry; For the spirit would grow faint before Me, And the breath of those whom I have made.</p> <p>¹⁷ Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain [opposite of mercy] I was angry and struck him; I hid My face and was angry, And he went on turning away, in the way of his heart.</p> <p>¹⁸ I have seen his ways, but I will <i>heal</i> him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners,</p> <p>¹⁹ Creating the praise of the lips. Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near,” Says the LORD, “and I will <i>heal</i> him.”</p> <p>²⁰ But the wicked are like the tossing sea, For it cannot be quiet, And its waters toss up refuse and mud.</p> <p>²¹ “There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”</p>	<p>³ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (see also Isa.66:1 – 2)</p> <p>⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (see also Isa.61:1 – 2)</p> <p>⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (see also (Ps.37:11, 22, 29; Isa.54:2 – 3)</p> <p>⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (see also Isa.55:1 – 3)</p> <p>⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. (see also Prov.11:17)</p> <p>⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (see also Ps.24:3 – 4, and Dt.30:6; Jer.31:31 – 34; Ezk.36:26 – 27)</p> <p>⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (see also Isa.57:18 – 19)</p> <p>¹⁰ Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>¹¹ Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</p>

Questions

1. Is Jesus trying to describe one person or eight different people? (Answer: one person, but let the conversation flow for a while)
 - a. Happiness: Jesus first describes the state of happiness in his kingdom. The word 'blessed' (*makarios*) was the same word people used to describe life on the near-perfect island of Cyprus. The state Jesus describes is like a Club Med vacation!
 - i. Break up into pairs. Make eight statements about what our culture (or our campus) says it takes to be happy. Phrase each as follows:
 - ii. 'Happy are the _____; for they _____'
 - iii. Read Jesus' statements. How do they compare?
 - b. Notice how Jesus says 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' in v.3 and v.10. Why might he repeat this? To emphasize that these things are a package deal. One cannot be wrenched out from the others. Thus...
2. Why might the first two feel good to people? Only if they are spiritually needy and honest about it.
 - a. v.3 echoes or restates Isaiah 66:1 – 2, the anticipation of the new covenant shift that God will dwell with/within the humble and poor in spirit. This is great in terms of identifying God's heart to be with and indwell us. The gates of the kingdom open wide for the one who comes to Jesus without spiritual resources of their own. To be 'poor in spirit' is to say, 'Lord, I need You. I have no resources on my own.'
 - b. v.4 comes from Isaiah 61:2, about the Servant's mission 'to comfort all who mourn.' In that context and in this one, it is about mourning one's own sin; the word 'comforted' is related to the word 'comforter' and contains intimations of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. To mourn is to say, 'Lord, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for what my sin and that of others has caused.'
3. The third and fourth have to do with having a calling from God
 - a. v.5 is better read 'blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land'; and would therefore be a direct quotation from Psalm 37, which repeats it several times. The main idea is that of having a calling from God and an inheritance from God. Jesus is declaring that those who do not take matters into their own hands (like Israel historically did by negotiating treaties with enemies or rushing into battle on their own) will inherit the state of blessing and abundance from God. To be meek is to say, 'Lord, I trust You to lead me into my inheritance, the land of blessing. Not by my power but Yours.'
 - b. v.6 relates to the motif of eating and banqueting, for instance in Isaiah 55:1 – 2. It is about desiring (hungering and thirsting for) covenant faithfulness. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to say, 'Lord, I want to see You fulfilling Your covenant promises to Israel.' It has to do with total covenant-keeping on the part of Israel and also God. You would also want God to bring heal the human nature problem which Israel had diagnosed. Moses and the Prophets alike were anticipating the resumption of the covenant; Jesus is now declaring it. Righteousness is not just 'individual piety' and therefore is not just individual acts of prayer or kindness. That kind of thing is included in what it means to be God's faithful people, but there is much more at stake.
 - c. Leader Illustrate: tell a story of when you (or someone you know) recognized that you were poor in spirit (Lord I need you), mourned sin (Lord, I'm sorry), yet knew you had a calling from God (Lord, I trust you to lead me into the inheritance God had planned for me), and hungered and thirsted for righteousness (Lord, I want to live with your integrity).
 - d. Optional Illustration: Let me tell you Benjamin Carson's story. Dr. Benjamin Carson is now the Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins (since 1984). He is also a Professor of Neurosurgery, Plastic Surgery, Oncology and Pediatrics. His practice includes traumatic brain injuries, brain and spinal cord tumors, congenital disorders, epilepsy, and other diseases. He's written over 90 neurosurgical publications and has been awarded 24 honorary degrees. But his most transformative moment happened when he met Jesus. Being black and at the mostly white Higgins Elementary School in Detroit was hard. He was at the bottom of the class. What made it harder was that his dad left the family when he was eight, leaving Benjamin, his older brother Curtis, and his mother Sonya to fend for themselves on the streets of Detroit. Not surprisingly, with this background, Benjamin had a major problem with anger. In seventh grade, Benjamin was at his locker. A bigger boy was teasing him for something he said in English class. Their voices rose, and finally Benjamin turned away to open his combination lock. Just as he opened the lock, the other boy shoved him. Without thinking, Ben smashed the lock into the boy's forehead,

creating a three inch gash. In the principal's office, Ben apologized, saying sincerely that he hadn't meant to do it. Afterward, Ben forgot about it, saying to himself that he wasn't the kind of guy who'd split open a guy's head on purpose. But in ninth grade, the unthinkable happened. Ben was listening to the radio with his friend Bob. 'You call that music?' Bob shouted, flipping the dial. 'It's better than what you like!' Ben yelled back, grabbing for the dial. 'Come on. You always...' In that instant, blind anger took possession of Ben again. Grabbing a camping knife from his back pocket, Ben snapped it open and lunged at his own friend, toward his stomach. The knife hit Bob's heavy ROTC buckle with such force that the blade snapped off. It fell to the ground. Ben looked at himself in disbelief, unable to say anything. He turned, ran home, and locked himself in the bathroom for two hours. He looked at himself in the mirror. He felt sick. Even though Ben would say later that his temper was pathological, uncontrollable and irrational, he wrote, 'From somewhere deep inside my mind came a strong impression. Pray...I had been trying to control my temper, figuring I could handle it myself. Now...I knew the truth... 'Lord, You have to take this temper from me.' Something happened there in that bathroom. Because after that, Benjamin Carson was never controlled by anger again. He later became a neurosurgeon, in fact the one who separated the Siamese twins joined at the head by veins inside their brains! But what is important here is the deep character transformation that Jesus brought about in him. Benjamin Carson could have been a competent anything. What matters is why: that why is discovering his spiritual poverty, mourning his sin, entrusting his life to Jesus to lead him – precisely the first 3 beatitudes here.

- e. What does it mean about Jesus that he gave those four first? In order to enter his kingdom, you have to acknowledge emptiness and spiritual need. No pretending, no arrogance. This is important because what Jesus calls us to is so radical that we'll need to come back continually to these first four beatitudes to be reminded that Jesus can indeed live through us in the ways he commands us to live.
4. Is there a logical sequence Jesus is using here as we look at the next four? It seems like some kind of transformation is implied as we progress through them. Being merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker seem to flow out of the first four.
 - a. v.7 has to do with loving one's neighbor, but stated in terms of mercy. If you know how much you have been forgiven, you know how much others need God's mercy, too. Mercy, forgiveness, and loving one's enemy are strong themes throughout Matthew, and are the identifying ethics of Jesus' new covenant people. The seeming cause-effect language does raise questions. Probably can be understood to mean, 'If you have truly received mercy from Jesus, you'll be a fundamentally merciful person, and will ultimately receive mercy.'
 - b. v.8 being pure in heart echoes Psalms language (Ps.24:4, Ps.51:10, Ps.73:1) about God wanting His people to have pure hearts, based on God's forgiveness and cleansing of us. In this context, 'pure in heart' means dedicated to Jesus and his kingdom mission to heal and transform humanity. The Greek word also connotes being 'single' focused, which Jesus expands on later in Mt.6:19 – 24. Kierkegaard rightly said, 'Purity of heart is to will one thing.' 'Seeing God' seems to be meant in Heb.12:14, 1 Jn.3:2, and Rev.22:4 as a future event, but there is always the possibility here that Jesus is referring to himself or referring to seeing God's Spirit at work in the present.
 - c. v.9 being a peacemaker, to my knowledge, is not a direct quotation from an OT text. However, 'peace' (Hebrew *shalom*) is squarely placed in passages about new covenant hope (e.g. Isa.40 – 55). Jesus personalizes it and makes it a missional, evangelistic characteristic. He means probably the 'ministry of reconciliation' between humanity and God that Paul speaks of in 2 Cor.5:18-20 as well as the 'peace' spoken of between Jew and Gentile in Eph.2:11-22. Being a 'son of God' of course reflects Jesus' own role in bringing peace, and thus identifies us with Jesus.
 - d. v.10 – 12 link Jesus and his disciples to the prophets of old, since the prophets were persecuted. They bore the word of God, they insisted upon the return to covenant faithfulness ('righteousness'), and they were attacked and despised for it. We will have a role in the world calling it to Jesus, and the world will respond negatively to the message and often to us. But we are not to back down or hide. This will tie in to why we are a city on a hill (the new Temple dwelling place of God, the new Jerusalem) and salt of the earth.
 - e. Why would the 'righteous' be persecuted? Perhaps because they are 'peacemakers' between God and humanity and between human beings, too. People may not be interested in 'peace with God' through Jesus, or they think that 'peace with God' can be achieved without Jesus. Nor are they all

that interested in peace with one another, even though Jesus will call his people to love their enemies, etc.

- i. Why in the world would they be happy about it? Because they are seeing God at work in themselves and other people. 'Pure in heart' also means 'single-minded' or 'single-focused.' Soren Kierkegaard accurately said, 'Purity of heart is to will one thing.' That thing seems to be Jesus and his kingdom.
 - f. Notice how Jesus goes from the generic 'they' to the specific 'you' in v.11. This has a dramatic effect. It builds a lot of momentum, that's for sure! It makes all the previous beatitudes roll into that last statement.
5. Application points:
 - a. **STATE STRONGLY:** Jesus is not talking about eight different people. He is talking about one person, and the process he calls all people into with him. **THE EIGHT BEATITUDES REFLECT A PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION WITH JESUS.** We go through it at conversion, and we will surely go through it multiple times over multiple issues afterwards, but the principle is the same. This is how Jesus transforms us.
 - b. How can your sense of happiness and blessedness deepen in Jesus?
 - c. How can you see Jesus' definition of blessedness/happiness as having an impact on the people around you? Who in particular? Why?
 - d. What about Jesus' process of transforming us is freeing and liberating? What about Jesus is challenging?

Spiritual Influence

Matthew 5:13 – 16

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² He opened his mouth and began to teach them, saying,

³ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹³ You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. ¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

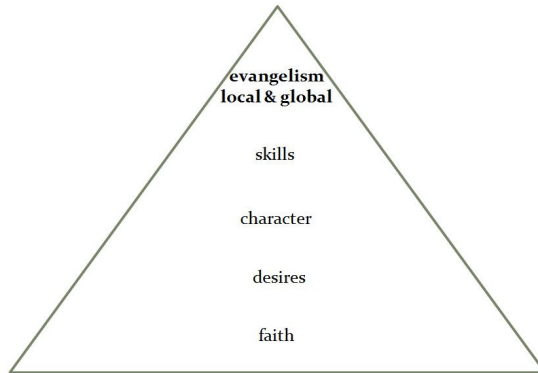
Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel's Exile*: The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- *The Kingdom of God*: The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called 'the kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God'. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans. Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human nature, which he had to accomplish first in himself (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), and then in his followers. Jesus had just announced 'the kingdom of heaven' (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations.
- *The Beatitudes*: Recall that in Matthew 5:1 – 12, Jesus is describing one person, not eight different people. He is describing a sequence of how he transforms our character through our faith in him. Now, Jesus will talk about influencing others using this language of being salt and light in the world.

Questions

1. (Discuss) What kind of influence does Jesus expect his followers to have?
2. Recall the pyramid of personal development we're using. The goal of our spiritual transformation is not just for us! It's to influence others.

The Development of Christians



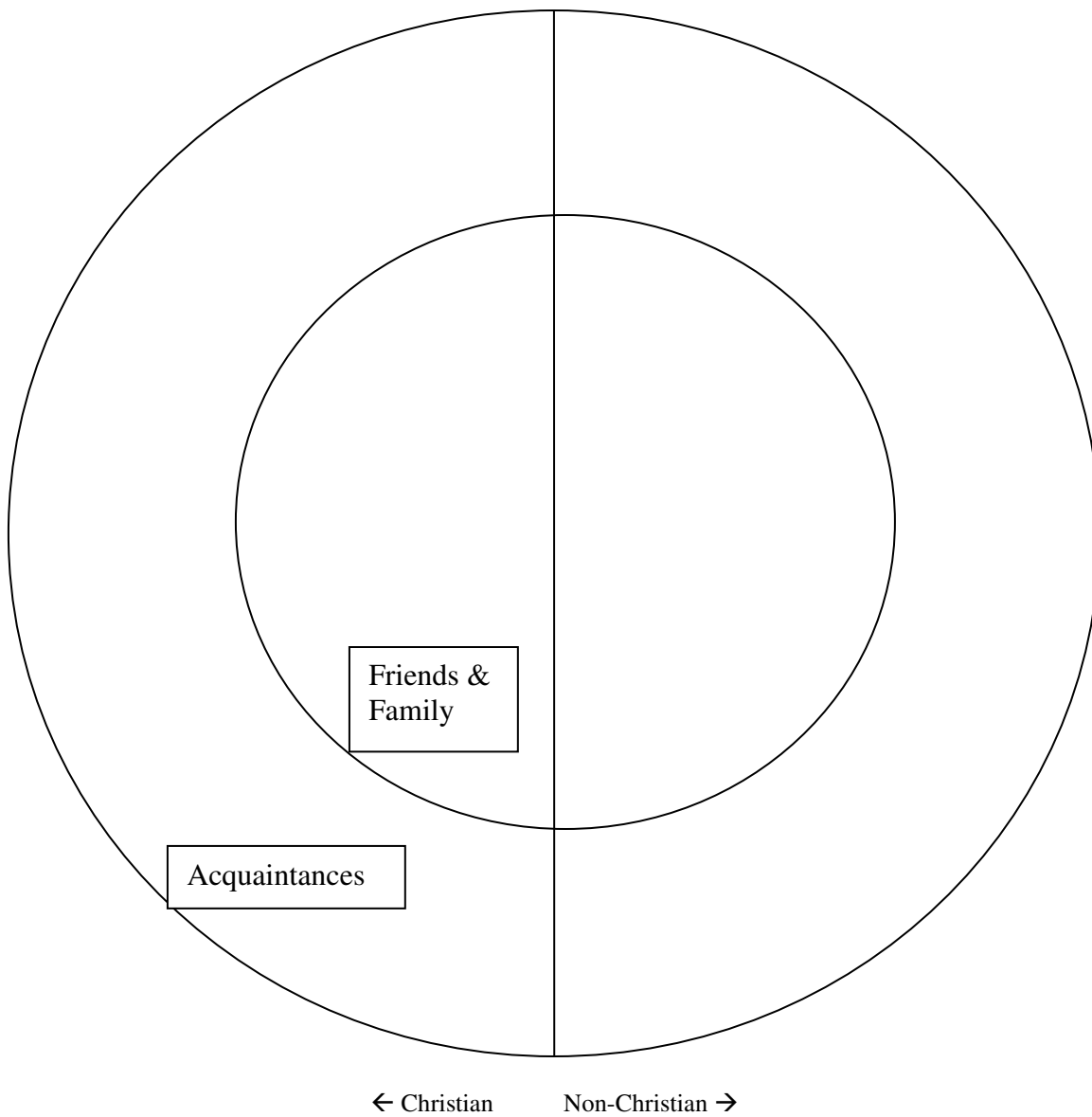
3. How does the salt and light passage connect with the beatitudes before them?
 - a. First, what are salt and light? How much salt do you use to season your meal? How many light bulbs do you need to light a room? They are small quantities that exercise influence in the world around them.
 - b. What does this suggest about how a small number of Christians can influence the world around them?
 - c. Give an example: A friend of mine lived in a fraternity house and was the only Christian. He made a commitment not to swear or use hard language. Over the course of one year, there was a marked change among the men who lived in that frat house. They became cleaner in their speech. They swore less. They answered the phone more politely.
 - d. Why would this have been exciting to the disciples at that time? Is it exciting now?
 - e. What about a 'city on a hill'? What is that? A city on a hill does not dominate the landscape. Yet it gives you something to orient yourself by. In that specific context, I think Jesus was speaking of Jerusalem. Jerusalem had the physical Temple building, which once housed the presence of God. But now, Jesus was saying that his community of followers was the new Temple of God, housing God's presence by his Spirit! They would be the reference point by which other people oriented themselves.
4. Why would these character qualities in v.3 – 12 be so influential with people?
 - a. Because people don't like to pretend they're something they're not, so the fact that this whole thing begins with 'poor in spirit' and 'mourning' gives us the space we need to admit things aren't right with ourselves.
 - b. Because people desire to be 'clean' or 'righteous' before God deep down inside.
 - c. Jesus says that we will be influential for him NOT by being rich and famous, and then 'leveraging' that influence 'for his sake.' True influence comes from being faithful. Otherwise, it's misleading. You get the impression that what's really influential is wealth, fame, and power, so you strive for those things, and the striving for them ruins your character and your witness. You'll be too busy to be kind, have a conversation, and be articulate about how Jesus is transforming you.
5. Why would this transformation of character NOT be influential with people?
 - a. Sometimes people react to you as if you're judging them, even though you're just allowing Jesus to transform and heal you. They do sense a judgment on sin of some sort, even though you don't intend to communicate that personally. Of course we have to be tactful and communicate our love for them. But this feeling is unavoidable. Paul said, 'For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from

death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.’ (2 Cor.2:15) Jesus does say (in v.10 – 12) that his disciples will be persecuted, after all!

- b. As an example of this, consider what happens when a person comes to Jesus and decides they don’t want to get drunk at parties anymore. Sometimes their drinking buddies will feel resentful, even though their friend still cares about them and wants to continue in friendship. But this is not the fault of the Christian. Although this may sound unkind, it is their problem. The same thing has happened, in my observation, with people who become less greedy and careerist because of Jesus. Or with people who become less co-dependent because of Jesus. When I moved into an inner city area to live with Mexican immigrant families, out of Jesus’ sense of love and mercy towards them, my mom hated it and disowned me for a while, primarily because she didn’t like my Mexican neighbors and friends.
6. (optional) STATE: This is where I think the posture of Christian ‘culture warriors’ in the U.S. is misguided. They think that Christians need to take control of government, media, schools, and companies in order to exercise influence in this culture. What would Jesus have to say about that, based on Matthew 5:1 – 16? Is spiritual influence really based on having some formal position of power and prestige?
- a. No!! It is based on Jesus transforming our character through the sequence in v.3 – 12.
 - b. Illus: After my freshman year of college, I went to be a Christian camp counselor at a week-long family camp. I was a counselor for rising seniors in high school, boys. This was through my home church, a Japanese American church, and a few sister churches on the West Coast. It was also one of my first experiences in ministry, so I was a little nervous. But the boys, who were wanna-be Asian gangsters, seemed to respect me. Even late at night when I would tell them to go to bed. Now it seemed to me like they respected me for fairly superficial, fleshly reasons, like the fact that at the time I drove a car that they liked, or that I had a cool jacket, or that I went to Stanford. They didn’t really care much about my experience with Jesus. But at the time, I didn’t mind, because it helped me get some sleep! I had the chance to meet up with some of them a couple weeks later at a post-conference rally. I talked with one of the boys. I asked him how it was going. He said fine. I asked how he was doing spiritually. He said, “Well, I’d like to be a good Christian, but I don’t think I can.” I asked him why. He said, “Because I can’t be a really good student.” Deep in my gut, I wanted to say, “But you don’t have to be a really good student to be a good Christian,” but I didn’t know how to say it at the time. On my way home, I felt like God helped me piece it together. He was saying, “I can’t be a good Christian, because I can’t be successful like you.” I said back to God, “But I never said that.” God seemed to say in reply, “You didn’t have to. It’s still in your heart. You value Jesus AND success equally, and here is a pivotal point – what do you really value?” I went home and cried. That was a real shock to me. It might be a real shock to you. So often we think if we have Jesus AND are part of the successful group, we’ll be better off. Don’t get me wrong: It’s good to come to Jesus if you’re powerful. It’s good to come to Jesus if you’re wealthy. It is bad when Christians cannot let go of the privilege or power, and instead protect it using a kind of faulty theology.
 - c. STATE: We can connect this with Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness. Jesus refused to turn stones into bread, implying having some ability to buy people’s votes by giving them food. He refused to jump off the Temple tower and have angels catch him before he fell, implying having the power to do miraculous stunts and be spectacular. He refused to share in Satan’s authority over the nations, implying sheer power for its own sake. Jesus refused to lead men and women out of an ego-boosting posture. Even efficiency was not the most important criterion for Jesus, because efficiency tends to enshrine power, celebrity, and wealth to accomplish an end supposedly superior to those means. But in the process, efficiency always becomes its own god, even when it promises to point to another. For example, someone might argue that we should first evangelize powerful, attractive, rich people because they will have more influence over other people than do disenfranchised, lowly, and poor people. Put so bluntly, the elitism and enshrining of power, celebrity, and wealth become obvious. Yet most of the time, we only think such things quietly to ourselves, afraid to face the absurdity of our own thinking. However, Jesus’ effectiveness and that of his people does not ultimately depend on power, celebrity, and wealth. **IT DEPENDS ON THE HEALING AND TRANSFORMING POWER OF JESUS, AT WORK IN OUR LIFE AND CHARACTER.**

7. Application points:

- a. We sometimes think that we lead people to Jesus by inviting them to a church meeting. That can happen, but thinking intentionally along those lines is FAULTY. We must do character-based evangelism, starting with being 'poor in spirit'. We must lead people to Jesus by showing and articulating the impact his kingship has had on our character. We do not lead others in a Christian sense by being superior to and more powerful than them.
 - b. How can you see Jesus' definition of blessedness/happiness as having an impact on the people around you? Who in particular? Why?
 - c. Who are the non-Christians in your life that you may have the chance to impact? Pray for them and pray for a chance to share part of your spiritual life story with them.
8. Application: Fill in the diagram below to see patterns.
- a. Think about the people in various places in your life: family, friends from high school, dormmates, classmates, other student organizations on campus, etc (be specific about the various areas of their lives just to get them started thinking). Place them on the graph.
 - b. Looking at the non-Christians in your life, what do you notice? Is it easier for you to have more and more Christian friends and fewer and fewer non-Christian friends? Is there another pattern?
 - c. Who do you feel comfortable sharing your faith with? (a common tendency is to feel that you have to be really good friends with people before you share your faith with them) You can share about Jesus with acquaintances too, before you're good friends! In fact, many acquaintances can become better friends with you on the basis of spiritual conversations. We'll talk about how to do that in a later session.



Goals: To help students identify and think more intentionally about...

1. Friendship patterns – ‘I don’t have many non-Christian friends!’
2. Evangelism patterns – ‘You mean I don’t have to make my acquaintances my friends in order to share my faith with them?’
3. Challenge of the lifestyle of evangelism – always leave room for new people in your life
4. Discernment – Seekers vs. ‘Snackers’ – ‘Who is a real seeker?’
5. (Why invest in a brand new Christian – ‘They have lots of non-Christian friends!’ For example: Terry Erickson, IVCF’s Director of Evangelism, did this a few months after becoming a Christian. He invited 10 of his friends to study the Bible with him. He said, ‘How about studying Jesus with me, and you tell me if you think I made a mistake.’ Six of those ten guys became Christians, too!)

Insofar as it’s appropriate to reflect on evangelism:

- State: Some of our non-Christian friends are seeking; some we don’t know where they’re at in their spiritual openness; some are ‘snackers.’ Let me read something by John Teter in *Get the Word Out* on p.78-79 about Seekers vs. Snackers. It comes out of a reflection on John 6, where Jesus fed the five thousand. They loved it. The next day, they followed Jesus around the Sea of Galilee and said, ‘We’re hungry – can you do that again?’ Jesus said, ‘NO. (Wow, huh?) I’m not going to feed you again, because you missed the point. I am the bread of life. You need to internalize me. I fed you bread because eating bread is a physical parallel of internalizing me.’
- From John Teter, *Get the Word Out*:

‘Seekers are people who are genuine in their search for God. They are looking for something more in this world and they have a conviction that Jesus offers something special. They are willing to pay great costs to enter into new, spiritual culture, to come to church, to study the Word, and to take real steps of faith toward God. These are the ones who will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Seekers have tasted something of God, and their lives have begun to manifest a deeper hunger for God himself.

Snackers are an entirely different type of person. The problem is that their actions and behaviors look very similar to those of seekers. Snackers are excited about being part of the spiritual ‘club’ that is developing. They love it that Christians are servants, and they are eager for more chances to be served. They can never eat enough free, fresh-baked cookies. They might even find the Word of God somewhat interesting. But they do little to change their lives after hearing the Word of God. They look like seekers on the outside, but inside their hearts and wired completely differently.

Jesus had a hard word for such snackers, according to John 6. He did not allow them to stay in their spiritual deception for long. He confronted them and called them to be true seekers. He publicly rebuked them for only coming for bread that fed their stomachs. His immediate challenge for them was to become true seekers.’

- Here’s an example of a snacker from p.82-83.

‘Michael lived on the dorm floor where a handful of Christian leaders had committed to reaching out to younger students and non-Christians. He came from a highly secular background and liked poking fun at Christians. Yet he came to our Bible study and enjoyed being around us. He particularly liked one of the Christian student leaders. He thought she was cute.

During the next nine months, Michael became a regular part of our lives. A *very* regular part. About five of us ministered to him. We would stay up at night answering his questions. We would go out of our way to care for him and bless him. We cooked for him, helped him with his laundry, let him borrow our cars, loaned him money. I even took him on weekend getaways with my friends. All of us thought that the next act of service, the next conversation or the next Bible study would be the one that would cause Michael to follow Christ.

Unfortunately that next step never came. He regularly told us that he needed God to do a miracle in his life before he would believe. When a miracle would in fact happen, he would come up with a new reason not to commit.

- Now, I don’t think he’s saying that we should just drop all the non-Christian friends we have who are not seeking. There is some value in being there for them because one day they might become true seekers. But there is an issue of proportion and balance. We need to invest our time wisely. And if we want to live an evangelistic lifestyle, we need to have some part of our lives be continually open to new non-Christians.

Heart Transformation for Reconciliation

Matthew 5:21 – 26

^{5:21} You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder” and “Whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.” ²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool,” you will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel's Exile:* The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- *The Kingdom of God:* The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called ‘the kingdom of heaven’ or ‘kingdom of God’. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans. Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human nature, which he had to accomplish first in himself (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), and then in his followers. Jesus had just announced ‘the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations.
- *Jesus' Transformation of the Human Heart:* Recall that in Matthew 5:1 – 16 Jesus was describing how his process of transforming people will have a certain kind of influence in the world. In this section, called The Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:28), Jesus is laying out his transformation of the human heart.
- *Liable to Judgment:* The local town court would hand down judgments in cases of conflict.
- *Liable to the Council:* The Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Jews made up of 70 elders, would weigh in on cases of the highest importance.
- *Liable to the Hell of Fire:* The valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem was a place where non-Jews and some Jews once sacrificed their children to the fires of the false god Molech (Jeremiah 19:1 – 6)
- *You Fool:* This was not a casual insult. From the Psalms, this is a term of excommunication or shunning. The Psalms say, ‘The fool has said in his heart there is no God’ (Ps.14:1; 53:1; cf. 107:17).

Questions

1. Discuss v.21 – 26. What questions or thoughts come to mind?
2. How does Jesus raise the stakes over the Old Testament law?
3. Notice that Jesus describes a progression of anger in v.22. Trace the progression of anger, and trace the progression of the warnings.
 - a. Angry → Insult → ‘You fool!’
 - b. Liable to judgment → liable to the council → liable to the hell of fire
 - c. One challenge here is Jesus’ hyperbolic language. He surely takes anger seriously, but it is a little uncertain what real life scenarios he refers to. He uses hyperbole to make his points. For example, in v.25, Jesus is probably envisioning a situation where you are at fault, and need to negotiate with your accuser before you get the guilty verdict pronounced over you. The scenario is probably not meant to indicate something about God being an accuser, judge, and then guard. The scenario probably illustrates the importance of settling matters quickly. Don’t make this an analogy of God.
4. Why might anger increase like this?
 - a. ‘If you are angry with a brother or sister’: Anger towards a person, if it is harbored, festers over time, smoldering like a coal while it consumes us. Bitterness is a stress on the body. It is like eating poison and hoping someone else dies.
 - b. ‘If you insult a brother or sister’: We start to rehearse our anger, and nurse it, and then envision how we could get verbal revenge. We gossip and form a coalition against the person. We become passive-aggressive. We assume the worst about the other person’s intentions. We address the person with profound disrespect.
 - c. ‘If you say, *You fool*’: This is not a casual insult. From the Psalms, this is a term of excommunication or shunning. The Psalms say, ‘The fool has said in his heart there is no God’ (Ps.14:1; 53:1; cf. 107:17)
5. How could anger become increasingly problematic in the way Jesus describes?
 - a. We explode at a time that is unexpected
 - b. Illus: my story of holding in anger against Ming during our first few months of marriage, when she didn’t get me orange juice!
 - c. We form a coalition, getting other people to side with us against the person
 - d. We divide the body of Christ over a personal, emotional grievance
 - e. On excommunicating a person over anger, and being liable to hell: What else can be thrown out, that Jesus has already talked about? Trash is thrown out, just like impure *salt* is thrown out and good for nothing. Because the Christian life is essentially relational, and rests on having relational integrity, breaking relationship over emotional grievances like this weakens a Christian’s integrity and witness, and may even render that Christian useless.
 - f. Obviously Jesus is using vivid metaphors to underscore his point. But why does he take anger so seriously? Why is anger something that renders a Christian useless to Jesus? Because he’s already said, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers.’ And also he’s going to talk about loving your enemies later. Someone not interested in reconciliation is useless to Jesus.
6. After speaking about anger in v.21 – 22, what would you expect Jesus to say? ‘So now, be really careful about anger in yourself.’ Yes? But no! He says, ‘Care about how other people experience anger at you.’ Read v.23 – 24:
 - a. God cares about human relationships more than religious ceremonies (offering a gift at the altar). Another way of saying that is that a very important form of worship is loving others and caring about your relationships.
7. Application: What does Jesus teach us about conflict resolution? Does it matter who started it? Or who’s mad?
 - a. It doesn’t matter who started it, or who’s angry (you in v.22 or another in v.23 – 26). We are to always initiate reconciliation.
 - b. Romans 12:18 says ‘Be at peace with all people, to the extent it depends on you.’ Sometimes conflicts can’t be totally resolved, but we have to give it a fair shot.
8. Application: Some of us don’t feel angry quickly, but have a delayed reaction of anger. Some of us get angry quickly. Where are you on this spectrum, and why?

- a. Does it matter? Eventually, it doesn't matter if you're the one who gets angry easily, or if you're the one who easily causes other people to get angry. Jesus calls us to care about other people's anger as much as our own.
 - b. Illus: Someone who is not so aware of the negative impact s/he has on others. This is a growth area.
 - c. How do you feel about this?
9. Application: How do you sense Jesus leading you in however it is you deal with anger in yourself and in others? End in prayer for each other.

Heart Transformation for Purity

Matthew 5:27 – 32

^{5:27} You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; ²⁸ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

^{5:31} It was said, ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’; ³² but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel’s Exile:* The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
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- *Jesus’ Transformation of the Human Heart:* Recall that in Matthew 5:1 – 16 Jesus was describing how his process of transforming people will have a certain kind of influence in the world. In this section, called The Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:28), Jesus lays out his transformation of the human heart.

Questions

1. How does Jesus' teaching here compare with U.S. pop culture's views on sex?
 - a. Acknowledge that it's difficult to hear or take seriously. Jesus seems prudish and out of date. Etc.
 - b. Acknowledge that it may be difficult to talk about this subject because of past hurt, shame, and not feeling sure that we can trust the other people in the room. (Leader: Gauge how people respond first. Be prepared to share personally about this; the level at which you share will probably set the tone for the other people in the group.)
2. Why is Jesus concerned about what happens in our hearts?
 - a. **PHYSIOLOGY:** Now before I get into the spiritual implications of this, let me demonstrate how this is true in one particular way. Physiologically, your choices shape your desires. If you're a man (I'm not sure how this works out for women) and you take cocaine, play lots of video games, or watch pornography, which are all high intensity escapist fantasy activities, and withdrawal from reality types of activities, the same pathways in your brain get stimulated. What does that do? Then your body produces more testosterone, which causes the hemispheres of your brain to become more separated. What does that do? That hurts your capacity for deeper emotional life. That means you'll be drawn into the same fantasies as before, and more strongly so. So you have the same desires for love, and meaning, and relationship, but you have these addictions to falsehoods that never satisfy you. Your choices shape your desires. It's not just that your desires stay constant. Your desires change, and you can shape them. In particular, you can allow Jesus by his Spirit living in you, to shape them. God created us all through His Word/Son, Jesus, so Jesus knows us intimately. He knows the way we were made. (See William Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*)
 - b. **INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER:** If anger is the heart attitude that gives rise to murder, lust is the heart attitude that gives rise to adultery (and other forms of sexual sin). He wants to cut sin off at the root.
 - c. **RELATIONAL REALISM:** Lust deceives you into thinking that there exists a woman or man out there who exists solely to satisfy your needs. That 'person' is purely a figment of imagination. Then you get smacked upside the head with how difficult marriage and/or dating actually is.
 - d. **COMMUNITY:** Lust affects how we actually interact with members of the opposite sex and the same sex. An important analogy: In the military, adultery is forbidden because it affects the ability of men to fight side by side and trust each other, and increasingly, for women to fight and serve side by side and trust each other, too. Jesus is building a community of trust with a mission together. What would it be like to not have that trust? Among men? Among women?
 - e. **HONORING MARRIAGE:** What does this show about Jesus' view of marriage?
 - i. If possible, and if appropriate, discuss how important it is to keep your thoughts pure when you're married. And yet how difficult... What is the impact of disciplined vs. undisciplined thoughts?
 - ii. Notice that Jesus' teaching on divorce raises the bar on what marriage is in God's sight. Moses had given the procedure for divorce (Dt.24), which is what Jesus quotes (and rabbinical opinion in the 5th century BC held that wives could also divorce their husbands). However, by the first century, the impact of Greek male-centric culture caused Jewish rabbinical thought to deteriorate. For one, wives were denied the right of divorce. Second, rabbinical opinion was split on the circumstances in which husbands could divorce their wives. Rabbi Hillel was more liberal, and on the side of men, that men could divorce their wives for cooking a bad meal or some such thing. Rabbi Shammai was stricter, teaching that divorce was only permitted on grounds of adultery. Jesus sided against the lenient view that gave men disproportionate power. Elsewhere, he also offhandedly affirmed that Dt.24 should be interpreted to mean that a wife could also divorce her husband, not in a lopsided way granting this right to husbands alone (Mk.10:12).
3. So what does it mean to take Jesus seriously as **people who struggle with lust**?

- a. Although Jesus' speech is hyperbolic in v.28 – 30, we need to deal quickly and ruthlessly with the 'right eye' or 'right hand' or whatever part of us through which lust affects us.
 - i. Application: St. Patrick of Ireland once wrote about baptizing a woman who was very attractive. He said, 'Praise the Lord' that God creates beautiful women. And then he moved on, without lust. That is probably the healthiest and most effective way to combat lust. It's to acknowledge God, and God's work! Right away, that puts our mind in touch with God and combats our tendency to think our own private thoughts.
- b. MEN struggling with temptation: Temptation comes through the eye. It was somewhat common for men who struggle with lust to blame women for dressing provocatively. Now, there is some warrant for that in Proverbs 7:10, for example, where a woman's clothing matches her fidelity and honor. But in our culture of blame-passing, it is easy for men today to simply blame women for dressing skimpily, thus passing the blame. While acknowledging that modesty could be more helpful, what responsibility must we as men take nevertheless?
- c. WOMEN struggling with temptation: For women, temptation more often happens through the ear. Although temptation could also come through the eye, as it does with men, women tend to become emotionally and romantically attached to a man by the words he says to her: what he shares about his life, the interest he takes in hers, the questions he asks, the gratitude towards her that he shows, the flattering words he might say, etc. While acknowledging that men don't always know what they're doing, how can we deal faithfully with Jesus in relating to men?
 - d. Have meaningful connections with people. Real friendship tends to help us not fantasize.
 - e. Get accountability with others
 - f. Ask Jesus how he sees people; don't just see them through the lens of your need
4. What does it mean to take Jesus seriously **as people who are also agents of temptation**?
 - a. MEN: Healthy friendship with women is very important, but sometimes we create emotional intimacy with women when we don't know the consequences of that on them. How can we be more aware of what we're doing? When do we know if we're really ready to be dating?
 - b. WOMEN: For men, temptation happens through the eye. Discuss this statement, 'Sex appeal is simply a way to play the game.' How do we faithfully follow Jesus in a culture where using sexual suggestion is okay?
5. (optional) When you leave this small group discussion and go back home, and your non-Christian friends ask you what you discussed, how will you talk about it?
 - a. For help, read my devotionals on Matthew 5:27 – 32, here: http://nagasawafamily.org/matthew_dev_05_27-32a.htm

Other Points of Discussion

1. What is the relationship between lust and true love from Jesus' perspective?

For both men and women, lust involves an oversimplification of another person. Men simplify women into sexual objects that are the extension of his sexual desires. What do the female characters do in James Bond? Fall for James Bond and have sex with him! Even when they're supposed to kill him! The Bond women are de-personalized sex objects. They have no desire for trust, safety, long-lasting commitment, or children. And James Bond has so much machismo, they can't resist. What makes this especially strange is that Ian Fleming wrote during what era in British history? The end of British Imperialism, when the British Empire was breaking up. (Casino Royale was in 1953, and he wrote until his death in 1964.) British men were suffering the loss of their machismo and self-delusions of grandeur. Yet what becomes really popular is the James Bond character who can still conquer any villain and bed any woman. Women are de-personalized, fantasy women who only live to satisfy a man's ego and sex drive. That woman doesn't really exist either.

Women simplify men down to the emotional areas of life that matter to her, treating him as an extension of her emotional desire. Jane Austen's novels exemplify this tendency: What do the men in Jane Austen's novels do professionally? Nothing. They are wealthy and aristocratic and do nothing except play the relational intrigue and gossip that the women do. This is ironic given that, at the time Jane Austen was writing, the British Empire was on

the ascendancy; British men were sailing all over the world in conquest and adventure. Yet Austen does not deal at all with the traditional tension between a man's desire for adventure versus a woman's desire for stability. Instead, she simplifies men down to how men matter to women. Thus, the remedy for lust is to see the whole person.

For a man, the intermediate step in dealing with lust is to resist the intake of images. He must release those images to the Lord.

For a woman, the intermediate step in dealing with lust is to resist the tendency to obsess about a man, define herself in relation to him, and treat him as an extension of herself. For women, discussing lust and passages like this ventures almost immediately into the topic of dating. This is typically because a woman's temptation to define herself and find identity in a man comes as a result of some interaction, friendship, and emotional intimacy.

2. Why does Jesus assume that only men can divorce their wives?

In Deuteronomy 24, the passage where Moses talks about divorce said 'a husband who divorces his wife...' Hebrew is a language that is gendered. It's like Spanish and unlike English where we have neuter words. In Spanish, one can say, 'ellos' to mean 'men' as well as to mean 'men and women,' for example. So the Deuteronomy passage uses the male third person Hebrew pronoun in a way that is inclusive of women, for space reasons. Rabbinical opinion recognized this and simultaneously applied Dt.24 to women being able to initiate divorce: 'a wife who divorces her husband...' This was held until the 5th century BC, where we have documentation of it. However, the impact of Greek culture on Jewish life reversed this at some point between the 5th century BC and the 1st century AD. Rabbis began to argue that only a man was permitted to initiate divorce. And Rabbi Hillel in particular held that a husband could divorce his wife for fairly trivial reasons. By the time of Jesus, in Jewish culture, a wife was very vulnerable and, in some parts of the Jewish community influenced by Hillel and others, at the whim and mercy of their husbands. A divorced woman was also vulnerable because social life was family-based, not individual-based. So a divorced woman would almost certainly have had to seek another man. Thus, the husband who casually divorces his wife (i.e. for any reason but her unfaithfulness) causes at least one adultery (hers), and usually two (also his own, if he remarries). The reasoning was, in Jesus' view, that the original marriage was not broken. The husband would also be failing Jesus' teaching in Mt.5:21 - 26 about reconciliation.

But the issue here is not only divorce, but who remarries, and when. It is assumed by the force and logic of Jesus' teaching that a man who remarries after a 'casual divorce' does in fact commit adultery. Jesus is forcing men to see the consequences of casual divorce on women. He is assuming that his audience understands that men who remarry under such conditions do in fact commit adultery, even though that case is not stated in the text itself.

One person also asked about the case where a woman was divorced against her will and suddenly finds herself unmarriageable because Jesus has denounced those who marry a divorced woman. It seems to me that Jesus is clearly sympathetic to the woman who is divorced against her will. His solution to that is to forbid divorces of that nature in the first place, and place a premium on reconciliation to preserve the marriage. Jesus was re-establishing the sanctity of marriage as God's ideal, and taking power away from husbands and giving it back to God. But apparently, he was not relaxing his standards on marriage, divorce and remarriage.

3. What about domestic abuse? Or by extension, other things like desertion, etc.?

Textually, we would have to think about passages beyond Matthew 5. God's ideal for marriage, most notably in Gen.1 - 2, would clearly not involve domestic abuse or desertion, etc. Genesis 1 - 4 taught Israel that women are co-image bearers of God with men, that the marriage unit is more central than the extended family unit, and that the source of polygamy was the violent family of Cain. The impact of Genesis 1 - 4 upon Israel's consciousness did have such an effect on them that domestic abuse was seen as a gross violation of Israel's covenant with God. Insofar as we know, domestic abuse only occurred in the worst periods of time of Israel's spiritual life: the time of the later judges in the Book of Judges. Although we might question whether the Old Testament authors, presumably being male, simply didn't acknowledge all the instances of (say) domestic abuse, we must also remember that the prophetic authors were prosecutors, presenting God's case against Israel before them, and they had every reason to expose every sin Israel was committing, especially against the foundational benchmark of Genesis 1 - 4.

Coming back to Matthew 5. Some people would extend the exception of ‘unfaithfulness’ to cases of domestic violence and not just ‘sexual unfaithfulness’. I’m very sympathetic to that, and would generally agree. That, too, has biblical precedent. In the Jewish Law, when it came to actual crimes, physical punishment could be administered in the household; but disproportionate or serious bodily harm was forbidden. Excessive bodily harm was grounds for the abuser to be punished equivalently (and eye for an eye), and for the injured person to be separated from the abuser even in cases of servanthood contract. It follows that physical domestic abuse, since it is not administered legitimately for a crime but illegitimately by sin, can be grounds for separation or divorce. But I think that those of us who do allow for that need to carefully think through this. There are also rare cases of wives inflicting physical abuse on husbands. And there are forms of prolonged verbal or emotional abuse that might merit expanding the category in that direction, too. And in reasoning this way, are we opening the door to ‘permissive position’ of Rabbi Hillel, in a way that may ultimately disadvantage women again? It may be wise to address domestic abuse as a serious problem *within marriage*, seeing it as a reason for physical separation with the hope of accountability, counseling, transformation, and restoration. After all, a Christian wife has immediate recourse to larger, and public, community action holding her husband accountable, according to Matthew 18:15ff. Jesus empowers others to intervene. A husband who ultimately does not leave physical abuse behind will almost certainly commit adultery because of the psychological power issues involved, freeing the wife to legitimately divorce him and remarry someone else with an absolutely clear conscience that she had done everything she could. So while I would personally grant it, I would also prefer to follow the process I just stated.

4. What are some other Scripture passages that are relevant to talking about issues of lust and sexuality?

- God’s Original Intent For Our Sexuality Was Good:
 - Marriage of male and female was made in the image of God, and very good! (Genesis 1:27 – 28)
Our sexuality is ‘very good’ when we are in proper relation to God and living within His vision for us.
 - There was no sin, no shame of being naked (transparent) with each other (Genesis 2:22 – 25)
 - Jesus is restoring human beings to God’s original creation order (Matthew 19:1 – 12) through union with himself
- God is Healing Us
 - God is healing human nature first in Jesus (Romans 8:3). God is so good that He already perfected a human response to Himself in the person of Jesus, who took to himself a fallen human nature, and lived among other fallen human beings, so he knows what it’s like to be tempted (Hebrews 4:14 – 16).
 - God is now healing us by the Spirit of Jesus (Romans 8:9 – 11)
 - Jesus draws us gently but truthfully to himself, by helping us acknowledge our sexual brokenness (John 4:1 – 30)
- God’s Forgiveness
 - When we believe in Jesus, our old self of sin is crucified with Christ, and we have his newness of resurrection life (Romans 6:5 – 7)
 - When we are joined to Jesus, God has no condemnation for us, because He has no condemnation for Jesus! (Romans 8:1; John 4:1 – 30)
- Our Identity in Christ
 - Our identity is in Christ, not in our moral failure, nor even in our moral successes (Romans 6:8 – 11)
- God is Sending Us in Mission
 - Jesus desires for us to worship him in his Spirit and in the truth of who we are, which involves sharing our story with others who need to hear it (John 4:31 – 42)

Heart Transformation for Integrity

Matthew 5:33 – 37

^{5:33} Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.’ ³⁴ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. ³⁶ Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel’s Exile:* The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- *The Kingdom of God:* The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called ‘the kingdom of heaven’ or ‘kingdom of God’. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans. Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human nature, which he had to accomplish first in himself (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), and then in his followers. Jesus had just announced ‘the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations.
- *Jesus’ Transformation of the Human Heart:* Recall that in Matthew 5:1 – 16 Jesus was describing how his process of transforming people will have a certain kind of influence in the world. In this section, called The Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:28), Jesus is laying out his transformation of the human heart.
- *Vows:* Just before this, Jesus had addressed the issue of lust and easy divorce (Mt.5:27 – 32). Since marriage is a type of oath, there is a logical connection between the previous topic and this one.
- *Oaths:* At the time of Jesus, some Israelites believed that swearing by less holy objects like ‘heaven’ or ‘Jerusalem’ was not as binding as swearing by God’s name. In the Old Testament, Israelites made certain vows as a public commitment to God for some purpose or other (Lev.27; Num.30). It was usually of a specific duration, maybe involving a journey (Gen.24:1 – 4; 28:20) or a promise of faithful conduct (Num.21:2). People also made vows to other people to honor promises or agreements (Gen.21:22 – 24; 25:33; 47:29 – 31). Breaking oaths, vows, and sworn promises was considered sinful; it polluted the vow-breaker and required ceremonial cleansing (Lev.5:4 – 5). Swearing by the name of God was a holy bond (Gen.24:3; Dt.6:13; 10:20); breaking that promise was to ‘profane the name of God’ (Lev.19:12). Regarding vows, Jesus critiqued the scribes and Pharisees for separating holy things (Jerusalem, the Temple, the altar, etc.) from God Himself (Mt.23:16 – 22).

Questions

1. (optional) Tell me about a time when someone didn't live up to their word with you.
2. (optional) Why do people not live up to their word?
 - a. They were just being polite when they said, 'Sure.' But they didn't really mean it. Like hitting 'will attend' on a Facebook event invitation even though you don't really plan to go. So conflict avoidance, fear of disappointing people (people pleasing) that just pushes it off to the future.
 - b. Prone to get overcommitted, too optimistic about being able to accomplish everything; lack of self-knowledge about one's own limits.
 - c. Lack of love for people later; not taking their commitments seriously; carelessness.
 - d. Their short term desires become more important to them than the previous commitments they had made. Fear of closing their options because something better might come along later; fear of having to sacrifice and lose out
 - e. They harbored reservations that they felt afraid of bringing up.
3. Now I'd like us to look inward and ask ourselves about integrity. Illus: Let me give an example of when my word and my deed didn't live up to each other. When my wife Ming and I were dating, we had been dating for about 2 and a half months when we started talking seriously about marriage. I told her that I knew I want to marry her and move across the country from northern California to Boston. She asked me, 'Are you sure you're ready to say that?' I said, 'Yup.' But then I started to really feel the cost of moving from all my friends, my neighborhood ministry, my church, and the region that I had fallen in love with for the last eight years. That's because I can make decisions based on a combination of a feeling deep in my gut and clear thinking – and I did feel those things. But I hadn't yet emotionally processed the goodbyes, the leaving, and the losses. I had relational whiplash. I had a hard time sorting through what I was having a hard time with. Was it the idea of marrying Ming? Was it the idea of moving across the country? So, during one phone call when I was telling Ming this, I told her it was confusing for me and that I had to take back what I had promised, to sort through it all. Needless to say, she was mad! And rightfully so. I should have processed all my emotions and thoughts before making a verbal commitment. It's not that integrity means being all gung-ho about making any commitment. Jesus' call to integrity of word and deed means that you really have to be self-aware and emotionally ready to make commitments. Otherwise, it is perfectly fine and important that you say you're not ready to make a commitment.
4. STATE: People took/take oaths when they need to reassure other people that 'I really mean it this time.' Jesus is addressing not just the issue of how to speak, but the larger question of our integrity. Let's read the passage.
 - a. Entertain questions like, 'So should we not swear to tell the truth, in court?' 'Should a Christian President not make an oath on a Bible when elected?' Quakers and Mennonites do decline to make oaths, which can get them into trouble by governments that require oath taking. Leo Tolstoy also understood Jesus as banning all oaths; he went a little far and argued for the abolition of all courts.
 - b. However, the apostle Paul made a vow (Acts 18:18) and swore his truthfulness by the name of God (Gal.1:20; 2 Cor.1:23). So it seems like Jesus was using hyperbolic language. It is still appropriate to remember or invoke the name of God when we are giving promises, making vows, declaring our truthfulness, etc. Thus, most Christian interpreters recognize that Jesus is making an implicit point with his audience.
5. Ultimately, what kind of person is Jesus calling us to be? Trustworthy, yes. But Jesus' goal is to make us more like *God*. God is always true to His word (Hebrews 6:17). In fact, He is so closely identified with His word that this laid the groundwork for saying that God *is* His word, which is personalized as Word (John 1:1 – 4). So Jesus wants to make us people of our word.
 - a. Word and deed are related in witness. The truthfulness of our word about Jesus is directly dependent on our deeds. Why? Because if we are speaking to others about the one who can heal and transform them, then we must let him heal and transform us first. We have to give evidence of that.
 - b. For the earliest Christians, they did not point to the New Testament and attempt to prove that it was historically accurate, true, factual, etc. As important as that is to us, that wasn't an option available to them. They also had the Old Testament, but what was really important to the earliest Christians was the power of their lived experience of Jesus.
 - c. The counterexample of integrity of word and deed was Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5:1 – 11. They sold some land, and brought only a portion of it to the apostles to give to the needy, saying

that it was the whole amount he had gotten for the sale. Simon Peter didn't fault him for keeping some of the proceeds; he acknowledged that Ananias and Saphira had every right to dispose of the proceeds as they wished since it was theirs. Instead, Simon Peter rebuked them for lying about bringing the whole amount, as if they had made a more heroic and charitable act. Ananias and Saphira had destroyed their own credibility and integrity, in a day and age when the witness of Christians to the truth of Jesus rested on their own word-deed integrity. So God took their lives and took them home. Even though we don't expect God to do that today when we lie and damage our own integrity, nevertheless He could! And that story is a cautionary tale.

6. Does Jesus take our commitment to him as a vow? Is a conversion a vow or promise?
 - a. Yes, scary as that is!! We are committing ourselves to him, in every way and in public and private matters.
 - b. Not only that, we start to participate in the very life of this God who is absolute integrity between His word and His deed. Because He has spoken in Jesus to transform human nature, that is what He is doing, and what we are participating in.
 - c. What if we fail him? Are we profaning his name if we sin? Yes. But by our confession, we also ask for his cleansing and testify to the truth, that we are in process and that he is still at work in us. See 1 John 1:6 – 10: ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.'
 - d. Illus: When I graduated from college, our commencement speaker was Yale Law professor Stephen L. Carter, an African-American Christian. He is one of the most brilliant thinkers on the First Amendment, the freedom of religion, and its scope and limits. His talk about was integrity and how important it is to have integrity in relationships and in public. He defined integrity as three things: (1) *knowing* what you believe; (2) *doing* what you believe; (3) *saying* when you are *doing* what you believe. Now that I've lived a few more years, and seen my own failures as a friend, husband, father, and follower of Jesus, I would add a fourth: (4) *saying* when you are *not doing* what you believe. That is confession. But that, too, is integrity.
7. Application: Ultimately, are you a person that God and others can count on?
 - a. It seems likely that Jesus is connecting the topic of marriage (5:31 – 32) to vows and expanding on the nature of vows. So marriage is the first application. If you get married, you will take a vow, '...for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, to love and to cherish 'till death do us part.' That is crazy. That means sticking through it with your spouse through whatever they go through, be it Alzheimers, depression, unemployment, not wanting to have sex, and so on. A friend of mine once joked that wedding vows ought to read, 'Even though we're pretty young, and even though we've been on our best behavior throughout our courtship, and even though we have no idea how bad things can really get, I promise to love you, to be faithfully committed to you, and to put you at least as high as me if not higher, day after day, until one of us is dead.' That is a long journey. It is why many of us in this generation are afraid of marriage. Keeping your word can just be too intense.
 - b. Let's start now, long before you get married, if you do. How can you be a person of your word? Ask your friends whether they think you are a reliable person.
 - c. Don't say you'll come to events on Facebook or tell someone 'yes' just to be polite. That is people pleasing. Be more honest. Set expectations well. Communicate clearly.
 - d. If you change plans on someone, communicate well. Don't just text the person. Also, if you think it might be a bigger deal to the other person, then ask, 'Hey, I'm sorry I have to change my commitment. I want to know if this affects you in any way.' Hear their feelings about it. You may need to apologize or make it up some other way.
 - e. Look at the leadership standards agreement for the Christian fellowship you're at. It most likely says that the character standards for leadership are nothing more than what Jesus calls all his followers. Even if you were not to be a leader, would you agree to that portion?

Heart Transformation for Love

Matthew 5:38 – 48

³⁸ You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. ⁴¹ Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴² Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel’s Exile:* The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- *The Kingdom of God:* The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called ‘the kingdom of heaven’ or ‘kingdom of God’. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans. Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human nature, which he had to accomplish first in himself (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), and then in his followers. Jesus had just announced ‘the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations.
- *Jesus’ Transformation of the Human Heart:* Recall that in Matthew 5:1 – 16 Jesus was describing how his process of transforming people will have a certain kind of influence in the world. In this section, called The Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:28), Jesus is laying out his transformation of the human heart.
- *Clothes:* Clothes were often used as collateral in Jewish culture and law (Ex.22:25 – 27; Dt.24:10 – 13). It was what you needed at night to stay warm (Ex.22:27, Dt.24:12 – 13).
- *Going a Mile:* Under Roman law, Roman soldiers were allowed to force Jews to carry their equipment for one mile. Needless to say, Jews despised Roman occupation.

Questions

1. This is radical stuff! Francis of Assisi, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. saw this section as fundamental to Jesus' message.
2. 'Do not resist an evil person'?
 - a. Before we interpret this to the extreme of being a doormat, or passively letting others commit evil (e.g. sexual harassment, etc.), let's see what Jesus is actually saying.
 - b. In this passage, Jesus contrasts not resisting an evil person with the Old Testament law of lex talionis, and eye for an eye. This appears in three places in the Torah both as a limit and a just penalty for an injury committed against someone else (Ex.21:22 – 23; Lev.24:19 – 20; Dt.19:21). So we are not to seek to do the same thing to someone else, i.e. to inflict the same injury on them which they did to us.
 - c. Also, Jesus had already taught about anger and reconciliation (Mt.5:21 – 26). So, we are supposed to approach someone if they have hurt us, to try to work out what reconciliation would mean.
 - d. Later, Jesus will teach about confronting a Christian person who sins (Mt.18:15 – 17). In the church, there are appropriate measures to take to get recourse, be heard, make a case, etc. Presumably if there are appropriate measures outside the church, i.e. with the appropriate legal authorities, those measures can be considered. What Jesus says below will have a bearing on how we do that.
 - e. Now, let's look at the examples Jesus gives, below.
3. Example 1: What is a slap on the right cheek? A slap on the left?
 - a. A right handed person (assuming that the majority of people are right handed) would slap a person on the left cheek. How would you slap a person on the right cheek? With the back of your hand.
 - b. So what kind of attack would this be? A social insult
 - c. The Jewish Rabbis had a law based on oral tradition found in what is called the Mishnah that said you could seek restitution in court. The offending party would be required to pay 200 zuz (a monetary unit) for a fronthanded slap and 400 for a backhanded one. So in that culture, you could take him to court and sue him for insult.
 - d. What would it mean to make your other (left) cheek vulnerable? What hand would your opponent have to use to slap your left cheek? Back of his left hand. That would be even more awkward.
 - e. What's Jesus' intention here? Calling attention to your opponent's willingness to insult you (presumably for following Jesus, see 5:10 – 12), even if it's awkward for them to do it.
 - f. Practical application: Your reputation is not your own
4. Example 2: Why would someone want to sue you and take your shirt?
 - a. Clothes were often used as collateral in Jewish culture and law (Ex.22:25 – 27 and Dt.24:10 – 13). It was what you needed at night to stay warm (Ex.22:27, Dt.24:12 – 13).
 - i. It's possible that Jesus was calling his disciples to forsake the collateral they had put down in order to borrow something. For example, if the fisherman disciples were borrowing someone else's nets, or owed money on nets, they had to lose their collateral (clothes) because they were leaving their job to follow Jesus.
 - ii. It is difficult to translate this into modern terms. Perhaps the most pertinent would be if you had just bought a house via mortgage, and offered the house itself as collateral. If you felt Jesus calling you to some other job or some other place, you might have to let the bank repossess your house because you put it as collateral.
 - b. Practical application: Your future financial standing and past obligations are not your own. If someone is trying to stop you from following Jesus in a situation like this (notice that that is the implied 'evil'), you take the appropriate losses.
5. Example 3: How would you have felt if a Roman soldier made you, as a Jew, carry his stuff for a mile?
 - a. Furious! Yet you would have to be free from anger and desire for vengeance in order to do this thing Jesus calls for. Jesus is saying to be free from these emotions.
 - b. How would the Roman soldier have reacted?
 - c. What would you talk about during the two mile journey? Jesus...?
 - d. Practical application: Your emotions are not your own. Your time is not your own.
 - e. Illus: Susan* discovered that her college sorority treasurer was doing inappropriate things with some money. Since Susan felt like they held a public responsibility of trust, she had gone ahead and told the other officers in the sorority (the right thing to do, in my opinion). The treasurer was confronted and eventually asked to step down. Most of the other women were quite angry. The

other sorority officers maintained a cold formality towards the ex-treasurer, as they felt they had the right to basically cut off their friendship without saying that they were doing so. But Susan allowed Jesus to shape her response; she gave up her right to just ostracize her. Every couple of weeks, Susan met her for coffee. Their friendship continued. Sometimes loving a person who has done wrong means helping them accept the consequences of their wrongdoing and walking with them through it. (For sexual wrongdoing, the walking with them part might not be possible or advisable).

- f. Illus: ‘Never hate, because it ends up in tragic, neurotic responses. Psychologists and psychiatrists are telling us today that the more we hate, the more we develop guilt feelings and we begin to subconsciously repress or consciously suppress certain emotions, and they all stack up in our subconscious selves and make for tragic, neurotic responses...And modern psychology is calling on us now to love. But long before modern psychology came into being, the world’s greatest psychologist who walked around the hills of Galilee told us to love. He looked at men and said: ‘Love your enemies; don’t hate anybody’... Hate at any point is a cancer that gnaws away at the very vital center of your life and your existence. It is like eroding acid that eats away the best and the objective center of your life. So Jesus says love, because hate destroys the hater as well as the hated.’ (Martin Luther King Jr., *Loving Your Enemies*, public domain sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, 17 November 1957)
6. Example 4: Giving and lending
- a. The Old Testament already had a strong ethic of helping anyone who asks (Dt.15:7 – 10)
 - b. Practical application: Your money is not your own.
 - c. Illus: When I graduated from college in 1994, I got a job at Intel, and soon afterwards I moved into a Mexican immigrant community to do ministry there. One morning, I was heading out to work, and Graciela Sanchez, a grandmother who was about 50 years old, asked me if I could give her a ride to work. Her usual ride, she told me, had been arrested. So I gave her a ride that day. We spoke in Spanish so I could practice. I gave her a ride the next day. I got to know her family better. I gave her rides to and from her work for over a year. Needless to say, that constrained my work hours. This was during the heyday of the late 90’s when the stock price was doubling every year. Employee surveys showed that over 2/3 of all Intel employees worked more than 50 hours a week. Usually, single people lead the rat race because it’s not until you’re married do other people look at you as if you have a life outside of work. But I wasn’t married then; instead, I was doing enjoying what Jesus was doing through me, enjoying my Christian team of friends, and discipling some younger guys. One day my supervisors offered me a promotion. I thought and prayed about it, studied Scripture, and decided NO. It would require too much from me. Some said, “Really? You’d get more stock, more impact in the company, more visibility.” I said, “I’m sorry. I’m a Christian, and I feel like what Jesus is doing with me outside of work is too valuable – I don’t want to cut into that.” Within the next year, they offered me another promotion, and I turned that one down, too. By the time I was there for 4 years or so, I had mastered my job and was working about 30 hours a week. People knew that I loved Jesus and that he mattered to me, not least because every Monday, my co-workers asked me how my weekend was, and I told them about the youth in my apartment, about how we prayed for them, about how we valued spiritual mentoring, about how I saw families that had been transformed. And most importantly in this example, Grandma Graciela had asked me if I could be ‘el padrino’ – the godfather – to her son Uriel. In Mexican culture, that is a huge privilege, and I felt very honored. I was able to share that. All these opportunities happened because I allowed Jesus to shape my response to those who ‘detracted’ from me.
7. ‘Love your enemy’? Really?
- a. It might be useful in our day and age to think of our ‘opponent’ or ‘competitor’ or ‘detractor’ in whatever we’re involved with.
 - b. Jesus does not mean that we must ‘like your enemy.’ Agape love is about self-giving, unconditional love, not sentimental feelings. Your enemy remains your enemy. We may be upset and frustrated, but we are to care for the person in some way, in a real relationship, that goes above and beyond what normal reciprocation would dictate.
 - c. It’s also not the case, I think, that Jesus is calling us to accept other people’s evil, or passively watch it happen. Jesus used force on one occasion, in the Temple (Jn.2:13 – 25), stressed financial compensation for past wrongdoing (e.g. with tax collectors in Lk.3:7 – 14; 19:1 – 10), and

denounced evil when he saw it (e.g. the Temple leaders devour widow's houses, Lk.20:47). We can call attention to it and, in Jesus' name and for their sake, call upon them to change. But there is a sense that in order to do that, and in order for us to be in relationship with 'evildoers', we will need to absorb some of their malice (or general unfriendliness) personally. We are not to retaliate injury for injury, however.

- d. In case it helps you to know, historically, the early church did not have a strict pacifist position. They permitted Roman soldiers to serve as a police force (non-lethal force was seen as ok). But for the first three hundred years, they did not allow a Christian to serve in the Roman army making war on another people. This was probably because they saw political entities as tolerable and a limited authority (Rom.13:1 – 7) and also idolatrous and demonically influenced (see 'rulers and authorities' in 1 Corinthians 2:6 – 8; 15:24; Ephesians 1:21- 23; 3:10; 6:12; and 'elemental things of this world' in Galatians 4:3 – 9; Colossians 1:16; 2:8; 2:15; 2:20) See Dale W. Brown, 'Pacifism' in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, p. 645.
 - e. Illus: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 'The rules were simple: If a white policeman or army officer voluntarily faced his accusers, confessed his crime, and fully acknowledged his guilt, he could not be tried and punished for that crime. Hard-liners grumbled about the obvious injustice of letting criminals go free, but Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu insisted that the country needed healing even more than it needed that particular brand of justice. At one hearing, a policeman named van de Broek recounted an incident when he and other officers shot an 18-year old boy and burned the body, turning it on a fire like a piece of barbeque meat, to destroy the evidence. Eight years later van de Broek returned to the same house and seized the boy's father. The wife was forced to watch as policemen bound her husband on a woodpile, poured gasoline over his body, and ignited it. The courtroom grew hushed as the elderly woman who had lost first her son and then her husband was given a chance to respond. 'What do you want from Mr. van de Broek?' the judge asked. She said she wanted van de Broek to go to the place where they burned her husband's body and gather up the dust so she could give him a decent burial. With his head down, the policeman nodded agreement. Then she, a follower of Jesus, added a further request: 'Mr. van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him. And I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I forgive him too. I would like to embrace him so he can know my forgiveness is real.' Spontaneously, some in the courtroom began singing Amazing Grace as the elderly woman made her way to the witness stand, but van de Broek did not hear the hymn. He had fainted, overwhelmed.' (from Philip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World*, 2003, Zondervan)
 - f. STATE: The ultimate aim of Jesus is to abolish the enemy, by making him a friend! By inviting the enemy to Jesus! This involves internal heart transformation for us.
 - i. God loves His enemies. Jesus himself concretely loved his enemies all the way through his death. But notice that his love for human beings who were his enemies was a purifying love? He was purifying his own human nature, by aligning it with the love of the Father, in order to give a new humanity back to us by his Spirit. So his love for his enemies is normative for us. Since not everyone will come to Jesus, our posture therefore needs to match the character of God (5:48), who does love his enemies.
 - ii. Incidentally, this is another reason why I believe hell is the purifying love of God. God loves His enemies. (Wouldn't it be weird if we had to love our enemies, but God did not?) What makes hell torment for people is that they refuse to allow Jesus to purify them. They receive his love as criticism, rebuke, rejection, and torture.
8. Love and Conflict
- a. Practical application: How does loving people in Jesus' name involve sacrifices of time, emotion, money, and reputation? Especially as college students?
 - i. Illus: leader share a personal story or personal hope about loving more people
 - ii. Illus: also share how this helps us know Jesus better
 - b. How is mere reciprocation a normal way of life? How does mere reciprocation lead to developing or maintaining enemies?
 - c. In any conflict, we can escalate the conflict or we can de-escalate it. Jesus clearly calls us to be peacemakers as he implied in Mt.5:9. But think about the heart change Jesus is really getting at

here: We are not our own, but Jesus' (1 Cor.6:18 – 20). Jesus is really getting at our rights to ourselves. There is no aspect of our lives that Jesus does not claim as his own.

- d. Practical application: What is a conflict situation you're facing, or can imagine facing? Roommate? Study group? Rival? How can you apply Jesus' love and strength and commitment to reconciliation to it?

Inspiring Story: An Unfinished Work

Silent Night, by Stanley Weintraub, is the story of Christmas Eve 1914 on the World War I battlefield in Flanders. As the German, British, and French troops facing each other were settling in for the night, a young German soldier began to sing 'Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht.' Others joined in. When they had finished, the British and French responded with other Christmas carols. Eventually, the men from both sides left their trenches and met in the middle. They shook hands, exchanged gifts, and shared pictures of their families. Informal soccer games began in what had been 'no-man's-land.' And a joint service was held to bury the dead of both sides. The generals, of course, were not pleased with these events. Men who have come to know each other's names and seen each other's families are much less likely to want to kill each other. War seems to require a nameless, faceless enemy. So, following that magical night the men on both sides spent a few days simply firing aimlessly into the sky. Then the war was back in earnest and continued for three more bloody years. Yet the story of that Christmas Eve lingered - a night when the angels really did sing of peace on earth.

Folksinger John McCutcheon wrote a song about that night in Belgium, titled 'Christmas in the Trenches,' from the viewpoint of a young British soldier. Several poignant verses are:

'The next they sang was 'Stille Nacht,' 'Tis 'Silent Night', says I.
And in two tongues one song filled up that sky
'There's someone coming towards us!' the front line sentry cried
All sights were fixed on one lone figure coming from their side
His truce flag, like a Christmas star, shone on that plain so bright
As he bravely strode unarmed into the night.

Soon one by one on either side walked into No Man's land
With neither gun nor bayonet we met there hand to hand
We shared some secret brandy and we wished each other well
And in a flare-lit soccer game we gave 'em hell.
We traded chocolates, cigarettes, and photographs from home
These sons and fathers far away from families of their own
Young Sanders played his squeeze box and they had a violin
This curious and unlikely band of men.

Soon daylight stole upon us and France was France once more
With sad farewells we each began to settle back to war
But the question haunted every heart that lived that wondrous night
'Whose family have I fixed within my sights?'
'Twas Christmas in the trenches, where the frost so bitter hung
The frozen fields of France were warmed as songs of peace were sung
For the walls they'd kept between us to exact the work of war
Had been crumbled and were gone for evermore.'

From Public Show to Deep Authenticity

Matthew 6:1 – 18

¹ Beware of practicing your righteousness before people to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. ² So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. ⁵ When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by people. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ⁶ But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. ⁷ And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. ⁹ Pray, then, in this way:

Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.	¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth As it is in heaven.	¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.
¹¹ Give us this day Our daily bread.	

¹⁴ For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. ¹⁶ Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by people when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face ¹⁸ so that your fasting will not be noticed by people, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel's Exile*: The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- *The Kingdom of God*: The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called 'the kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God'. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans. Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human

nature, which he had to accomplish first in himself (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), and then in his followers. Jesus had just announced ‘the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations.

- *Jesus’ Transformation of the Human Heart:* Recall that in Matthew 5:1 – 16 Jesus was describing how his process of transforming people will have a certain kind of influence in the world. In this section, called The Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:28), Jesus is laying out his transformation of the human heart.
- *Almsgiving, Prayer, and Fasting:* These were basic and central practices in Jewish life. They were done publicly in addition to privately.

Questions: Secrecy

...⁴ your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you...⁶ your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you...¹⁷ your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

1. Reflection: When do you expect the most THANKS or RESPECT, and if you're a Christian, especially from other Christians?
2. Look at the passage. Trace the theme of secrecy through it. Notice that giving, prayer, and fasting DO NOT make Christians different from other people. EVERYONE gives, prays, and fasts! What makes Christians different is HOW we give, pray, and fast, and WHEN, and WHAT is what our understanding of God as our Father.
3. (Note: I don't think Jesus means that we are to *never* actually pray in public, etc. The motivation matters, and also the practice of secrecy matters. The two are actually separate issues.)
4. How many times does Jesus say 'in secret'? Is this just about our motivation? For example: A person becomes a leader. He prays in meetings a lot, and says that he doesn't pray much in private. But he says he really wants God to be glorified and thinks it maximizes effort to pray in groups more than individually. What would Jesus say to this person?
 - a. This is important, because it gets at the fact that Jesus is NOT only talking about motivation, although motivation is important, too. Jesus is talking about secret time with God. Notice that Jesus does not say, 'When you fast, let people know because that will draw glory to God, but just get your internal heart motivation right.' He says, 'When you fast, don't let anyone know.' The same with giving. Why would Jesus want to conceal these aspects of our lives from the public?
 - b. Jesus is aware that even if we keep our motivations good while we are in public, that we will burnout. What prevents burnout is a sense of 'shared jokes' and 'shared secrets' we have with God. It's to be someone who prays or fasts for something without telling anyone, and then has God answer that, and it's a 'shared secret' between God and that person. What a rich spiritual life!!
 - i. Praying for a non-Christian, who then has these small 'revelations' or 'encounters' which lead to larger questions, who then becomes a Christian. You don't have to tell the person. Your prayer is a 'shared secret' between God and you.
 - ii. Jesus wants us to treat God as fundamentally separate from EVERYONE ELSE.
 - iii. Does it have to be alone? Is 'in secret' the same thing as 'in private'? No, it could be when other people are around, but you don't tell them what you're doing. Notice with fasting in v.16 – 18, this is the case – you groom yourself as you would on any other day. No outward signs, no complaining, no announcing.
5. What kind of community would it be where everything was for thanks, evaluation, and even show?
 - a. Verbally appreciative: Expectations are known, positions are defined, approval is given
 - b. Flattering for some: Some people just become good at doing what gets thanked.
 - c. Tiring. It could be lots of work
 - d. Hypocritical. Our inner being would become subsumed into our outer façade
 - e. Socially cliquish. We'd hang out with people who prayed well. We'd rank things, and then 'love those who love us.' Notice that this is the key dynamic that keeps us from loving our enemies, as Jesus talked about in 5:38-48. There is continuity between that section and this one.
 - f. NOT EVANGELISTIC: Because we're so busy serving other Christians, we don't do the thankless work of reaching out to non-Christians, particularly our enemies, the last, the least, and the lost. THIS IS CONTRARY TO JESUS' MISSION.
6. The word for 'hypocrite' in Greek means literally, 'stage actor.' What kinds of connotations does that have for you?
 - a. A stage actor's public persona matters more than what's really there on the inside in reality
 - b. A stage actor is always aiming to please a broad audience and get applause
 - c. A stage actor is virtually defined by the audience
 - d. A stage actor tries really hard
 - e. (Say: in all these ways, we are not to be stage actors. We are to have vibrant and real inner lives that are never totally on display. It informs what other people see and experience from us, but our public persona never takes over. We are aiming to please an Audience of One, not of many. We

are not defined by the response we get from others, but from God alone. We are not to try really hard, but to

7. Provide an illustration of someone who has much more hidden spiritually than they are sharing, and how centered and rooted that person is.
 - a. Illus: my friend who does dance and skits, i.e. very public gifts, but has way more than she ever shares, because she also does dance and skits that are just for Jesus alone.
 - b. Analogy: The movie Roman Holiday is powerful because Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn share a secret. It's just between them.
 - c. Illus: I want to be that person!! Because my life is so public, there are things that I have to do in private with the Lord that I don't share with anyone, sometimes not even my wife.
8. State: God does not just want to use you and work through you, although He does want to do that. He also just wants you. He wants to be with you, and share stuff just with you.
9. Why is secrecy hard?
 - a. Sometimes because there's a felt need to serve people all the time. For instance, praying with a younger Christian to teach them to pray. We do it to talk to God, but also to help them learn to pray.
 - b. Because we often want public leadership roles to pad our resumes. It's like this: 'How will this 'leadership role' translate into helping me get into med school???'
 - c. Because we crave response or validation from others. How do we deal with that?
 - d. Is this harder for extroverts than for introverts? There are probably slightly different dangers for both. Extroverts may find it hard to spend time with God alone, and need feedback to process whatever happens between them and God, so that nothing stays secret. That's a danger. But introverts may spend time just working on their private world rather than really spend time in God's presence. They may shine and polish what they're going to say in public so that when they do share it, people will say, 'Wow, you're deep.' That's a danger introverts encounter.
10. What kind of rewards does the Father give?
 - a. Himself!!
 - b. Deeper character
 - c. The ability to be faithful when people are thankless.
11. How have you experienced that? And how would you like to experience that more?
12. Application: Think of secrecy as a spiritual discipline – something only you and the Father know about. Pray about how the Lord might want you to practice that this coming week. Especially because many of you are going to be leaders in the Christian community in some way. Leadership is great – it helps you grow. But the danger in leadership is that your whole life becomes public. You need to have a part of your life be secret, shared with only God alone.
13. Is God good enough that you can make time for Him alone?
14. Read the story of Harriet Tubman (below) or Max Lucado's *You Are Special* to close. May this be a living parable for you and me!

Illus: Harriet Tubman understood what it was like to serve God in secret. She was born in Maryland's Dorchester County around 1820, into the terrible life of slavery. Around 1844 she married a free black man named John Tubman and took his last name. (She was born Araminta Ross; she later changed her first name to Harriet, after her mother.) In 1849, in fear that she, along with the other slaves on the plantation, was to be sold, Tubman resolved to run away. She set out one night on foot. Tubman followed the North Star by night, making her way to Pennsylvania and soon after to Philadelphia, where she found work and saved her money. The following year she returned to Maryland and escorted her sister and her sister's two children to freedom. She made the dangerous trip back to the South soon after to rescue her brother and two other men. On her third return, she sought her husband, only to find he had taken another wife. Ouch! Undeterred, she continued, and found other slaves seeking freedom and escorted them to the North. After the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850, she had to take slaves all the way to Canada. By 1860, Tubman had made the perilous trip to slave country 19 times by 1860, including one especially challenging journey in which she rescued her 70 year old parents. During the Civil War, Harriet worked for the Union Army, first as a nurse, then a scout, then as a spy working behind Confederate lines. After the war, she retired to a small house in Auburn, New York. She was tired and penniless, but still she devoted herself to providing shelter and care to poor blacks. She supported herself by selling vegetables from her garden. In 1869, a white admirer published a book called *Scenes of the Life of Harriet Tubman* as a means of earning her some money. But she gave most of that money away to people in greater need. When the book was published, Frederick

Douglass, the great abolitionist and former slave, wrote to her these words: ‘Most that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been in public, and I have received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way...I have had the applause of the crowd...while the most that you have done has been witnessed by a few trembling, scared, and foot-sore bondsmen and women, who you have led out of the house of bondage, and whose heartfelt ‘God bless you’ has been your only reward.’ (distilled from Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints*, p.135-6; see also Sarah H. Bradford, *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People*) Although we are meant to have a public relationship with Jesus so that other people are drawn toward him, not all our life is meant to be public. The deepest part of our life is meant to be quite secret. There is a deep authenticity and spiritual power that comes from this secrecy. When we sense God’s secret pleasure over us, we won’t feel the need to be recognized for it, as if the Christian life were just another popularity contest, or a competition between Christians over who produces the most results. When we are internally present to our Father alone, we will be empowered to continue in the most difficult tasks, in loving the most challenging people, asking for nothing more in reward than what the Father gives. There’s an art to receiving a thanks or a compliment, too. But there is a more substantive banquet the Father has for us. Let’s not settle for light snacks.

From Greed to Generosity

Matthew 6:19 – 34

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! ²⁴ No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

²⁵ For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? ²⁷ And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹ yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! ³¹ Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel's Exile:* The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- *The Kingdom of God:* The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called 'the kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God'. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans. Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human nature, which he had to accomplish first in himself (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), and then in his followers. Jesus had just announced 'the kingdom of heaven' (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations.
- *Jesus' Transformation of the Human Heart:* Recall that in Matthew 5:1 – 16 Jesus was describing how his process of transforming people will have a certain kind of influence in the world. In this section, called The Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:28), Jesus is laying out his transformation of the human heart.

Leader's Notes

1. I expect that this section will need a little more 'push' by the leader. There is less 'discovery' about this passage since the meaning is fairly on the surface. It's the implications that will be tough. Thus, the leader will need to 'push' a little more. Be spiritually and relationally prepared for it.
2. This passage is clearly about materialism, money and economic implications of lifestyle choices. There will be temptations to broaden the scope of the discussion, to refer to treasuring people's opinions, for example, but try not to do that. Focus on what the text says.
3. Plan the flow of the conversation:
 - a. Start as tangibly as possible.
 - b. Allow the text to challenge our socks off.
 - c. Close by asking people to take a tangible step of faith into the areas of our internal resistance.

Questions

1. Start as tangibly as possible.
 - a. Ask each person to write down or draw things that matter to them.
 - b. Ask people: Of those things, what would you give up to see a friend come to Christ?
 - c. State: The real question is what would we give up in order to see a lot of other people, whom we don't know yet, come to Christ?
 - d. OR, ask people: How did your family deal with money?
2. What is Jesus saying about how materialism is a source of anxiety?
 - a. In the passage?
 - i. E.g. Treasures on earth are such things as clothes and food. Jesus clearly asks us to give those things up, as indicated by 'do not store up.' People may have the tendency to say, 'He means our motivation – as long as we're not motivated by it, we can keep it.' This is NOT what Jesus says. It is a particular action Jesus is looking for. 'Do not store it up.' Jesus calls us to radical generosity.
 - ii. Tie in to Mt.5:38 – 48: We are to love neighbors, to give to those who ask, etc. This is concrete.
 - b. In your life? Here's an illustration:

What is anxiety? In the early 1990's, Robert Sapolski, biologist at Stanford University, set out to study stress and anxiety. He observed zebras being chased by lions. Life and death situation. The zebra goes into panic mode. During the chase, a zebra doesn't need its digestive system, so it shuts down. It doesn't need its immune system either, so that diminishes. All its energy goes into its legs and eyes, its muscles and nervous system. Now when a zebra escapes a lion, its stress level goes back to normal. That's why Sapolski titled his 1994 book *Why Zebras Don't Have Ulcers*. But what about us? When does our stress level go down? Why do we get ulcers? Because we live in a society where we're being chased by lions constantly. In fact, we often place ourselves before the lion.

In the March of 1996, I (Mako) was being chased by the lion. I had worked at Intel doing project scheduling, which is a form of in-house management consulting. I wanted three things: I wanted to have something to show for my two years there, I wanted a promotion, and I wanted Intel stock to do well because I had stock options. Materialism had bit me. I chose to be spread across two major projects. The managers were pretty demanding, and what made it worse was that no one knew how much work I was actually doing. For weeks, the pace was grueling. The worst of it was a block of time, four days in a row, where I came in before 8am and left at midnight. Almost all of the work was tense because I was doing a lot of keyboarding either with managers peering over my shoulders or with deadlines looming on my calendar. Suddenly I got hives, that gross red rash on my skin, and it was itchy, so I went to see the doctor. I asked her whether I had eaten something weird. She said no. It was stress. I was so anxious, she said, the anxiety surfaced in my skin. The hives lasted for four weeks. I had to take Benadryl for weeks to keep the hives down so that I could go to sleep. I later asked my doctor how she had known it was stress, and she replied that she herself had had hives for four weeks during her first year of medical school. She also knew of many cases in Silicon Valley where the stress does weird things to people. The lion is always ready to chase us all.

3. If Jesus were speaking v.19 – 21 in modern terms, how might he phrase it? He might say, "Don't store up treasure in the stock market, where the market crashes, or in banks, where thieves break in and steal." What does Jesus want us to value? HIMSELF!

4. What is 'treasure in heaven' and how do we store it up? (Acts of generosity and sacrifice? Seeking first the kingdom?) Reference Luke 12:13 – 34 to see where Jesus says 'Give to the poor' explicitly.
5. Another way of translating 'clear' in v.22 is 'single' or 'simple.' It seems to reflect a single-focusedness of the eye. Like 'pure in heart' from the beatitudes. If that's true, then can we value money and Jesus? No, that is like trying to have 'two masters,' which is impossible. Really we are valuing Mammon over God.
6. Jim Elliott put it this way: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." What do you think of his statement, and his life?
 - a. Illus: See my journal entry, below, and this story of Jim Elliot

Story of Jim Elliot: the son of a Scottish-American in Portland, Oregon. When he was a sophomore at Wheaton, Jim felt that Jesus Christ in him wanted to go through him to a Latin American country. Previously, Jim had shown great talent in architecture, which would have made him lots of money, but he gave that up to major in Greek, which of course pulls down very little! Jim translated Xenophon, Thucydides, and early Christian literature. He studied Spanish on the side because he wanted to preach in that language. He could have been rich in money, but in November of 1947, Jim wrote a letter to his parents, saying that he wanted to be rich in having Jesus Christ, not "all sorts of other baubles, social life, a name renowned, a position of importance, and scholastic attainment." Towards the end of the summer of 1950, when Jim was 23, he met a missionary to Ecuador who told him about the dreaded Auca tribe, the warlike jungle people who hated the white man. Their only known response to the outside world was to attack all strangers. Jim decided to go to the jungles of Ecuador, and even though he lost all the riches he could have potentially had, he wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Jim Elliott and four other men made contact with the Auca indians in 1955. In January, they lost everything. They were killed by the Aucas. What do you think about Jim's statement, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose"?

7. What kind of lifestyle does Jesus seem to be advocating here? The birds work for their daily food, but we want to accumulate.
 - a. What would it be like to stay at lower-paying positions to serve more people directly in a Christ-like way? A doctor or lawyer who serves the poor? Or an employee in a corporation who has more time to care for people because s/he doesn't climb the corporate ladder? Or a social worker in a community? Or not striving in order to be a good friend to people at Harvard? We would trade SECURITY for KINGDOM SIGNIFICANCE.
 - b. What would it mean to buy clothes at Goodwill stores, to buy fewer CD's, to look for more creative and less expensive ways of having fun, in order to commit to giving more money away?
8. What does seeking first the kingdom of heaven mean?
 - a. Seeking to manifest and spread the lordship of Jesus, especially through the ways Jesus has already called us to do in this section (community in 5:1 – 16, heart-level purity in 5:21 – 32, love for enemies in 5:38 – 48, cultivation of a deep intimacy with God in 6:1 – 18)
 - b. Sometime, people separate Jesus from the kingdom. As if the kingdom of God can be brought, done, or accomplished in a secular sense, as if all God was talking about is 'social justice.' Why is Jesus important?
 - i. He is the king of the kingdom, of course!
 - ii. He is the personal reign of God in a human being. No other human being can be said to show the reign of God, in all His goodness, in their life. Only Jesus has shown what it means for God to reign over everything in a person. That's why Jesus calls us to follow him. How does Jesus show what the reign of God is like, through his life?
9. In what ways is it liberating to be reminded that 'life' is more than things? In what ways is it challenging?
10. PRACTICAL STEP OF GROWTH: What can you/we do this week with our money or time that reflects Jesus' priority on advancing his kingdom?
 - a. Let go of one materialistic thing or goal that you're working towards, and instead do something that advances Jesus' purposes in the world
 - b. Meet with people regularly, and build it into your 'rhythm of life'
 - c. Learn how to deepen conversations so that it feels natural to talk about spiritual things, such as participating in one of the proxe stations that we host every so often
 - d. We aren't to stop with that, or feel satisfied. But we need to take a step no matter where we are because faith is like a muscle we strengthen and develop. Then take another step, and another...

Devotional Reflection on Mt.6:19 – 24
November 5, 2007

Today, my son John (who is now 7 years old) was looking at the pictures of the two children on our wall. We sponsor them through WorldVision. Spontaneously, he took all his money from his wallet to send it to them. His treasure was 6 one dollar bills. He was about to stuff it all into an envelope when I explained that we can't send cash through the mail, only checks. He looked at me and asked, 'Why?' I replied, 'Because other people will see it and just take it.'

That incident gave me pause for two reasons. First, I'm incredibly thankful for my son's generous spirit. This was the second time he gave up a significant amount of money for someone else. The first time was when he said he wanted to give it to a poor child back in November of 2006. That was when we started sponsoring the WorldVision children in the first place. Simplicity for the sake of generosity is one of the primary Christian values that my wife and I want to pass on to our children, as part of their knowing how to follow Jesus. John isn't always like this – who is? – but these moments occur from time to time. Perhaps they're from the Lord, gifts to us as parents.

Second, I was reminded of the fact that we don't send cash through the mail. People will steal cash, even when it's in an envelope with a child's writing, addressed to WorldVision.

'Do not store up treasure on earth' is a call to action. Many have tried to escape Jesus by turning him into a pious Buddhist: 'Well, Jesus really means that I can have lots of money as long as I don't really desire it.' It's not quite that detached. Jesus did want us to be concretely generous, after all. It doesn't make sense to say, 'As long as I don't lust, I can commit adultery.' So it doesn't make sense to say, 'As long as I'm not greedy, I can have lots of material possessions.'

The positive side of this call to action is, 'Store up treasure in heaven.' Heaven is the hidden reality that exists now. The prayer Jesus taught us to pray reflects that: 'On earth, as it is in heaven.' 'Treasure in heaven' not a personal bank account that you can cash out when we die and are 'in heaven.' Treasure in heaven is richness of character now, at this very moment. And the way to develop that richness of character is to be generous and sacrificial with our wealth. Jesus calls us to be open-handed with our enemies: 'If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also... Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you' (Mt.5:40 – 42). At other times, Jesus said to give specifically 'to the poor' (Mt.19:21; Lk.12:33). These are concrete activities that draw our enemies and the poor to Christ. This is how we 'seek first the kingdom of God,' not as an abstraction, but as a concrete movement of God among people.

So Jesus engages us with a set of searing challenges. He asks us what we value (treasure in v.19 – 20), what our focus is on (our eye in v.21 - 22), and who is our master (God vs. mammon). I mention how my wife and I parent our kids because it reflects our struggle to live those things very tangibly. Our true life values of financial prosperity, guaranteeing middle and upper class opportunities, security, stability, and self-indulgence often come out when we think about kids. Are we serious about Jesus' kingdom enough to want our kids to be passionate about him that much? We hope so:

- We live in a lower-income, higher crime neighborhood in Boston – and the least funded school district zone – with the desire to reach out to our neighborhood with the love of Christ. We hope they catch a similar vision, because when they are adults, most of the world will be urban poor. They will have great education from us in that sense, for the purpose of the kingdom of God.
- We own a three story house and share our lives with other Christians in an intentional Christian community. Our mortgage of \$2000/month is paid for by our rental income. We hope our kids catch a similar vision, since it makes a lot of financial, relational, and ministry sense. We are teaching our kids – and others all around us – that they, too, can live lives of deep impact without earning a lot of money, but rather by making smart life decisions.
- We are not saving up for our kids to go to private colleges, even though my wife went to Harvard and I went to Stanford, because we would like to adopt kids at some point and are saving up for that. If our kids go to a private school and get financial aid, we're happy for them to go, but we're planning on affording a public school education. Many people would say, 'We'll give our kids the best education possible, so they can make the choice to be poor when they're adults.' But that's evasive: It really means that when my kids are parents of their own kids, they should do the same thing, all for the sake of providing a theoretical choice to live radically that no generation actually makes.
- We try to role model generosity to our kids. We open our home up to our church to meet in our living room every Sunday. We let our housemates borrow our cars and anything else we own. We allow kids from the neighborhood to use our basketball hoop, sandbox, and swing set in the backyard. We've allowed kids from our neighborhood to stay with us for certain periods of time.

- We shop at second-hand stores, cut our own hair, and dress warmly during the winter inside so we don't use a lot of heat.
- We do not watch television channels with commercials. PBS Kids is great for that. Once, our kids turned the channel and saw an advertisement for a toy, and they immediately asked if we could buy it. Advertisements directed at children are incredibly manipulative.
- We celebrate birthdays by having a gift-swap. So rather than our kids get all the gifts, each child leaves with a gift. This teaches our kids not to expect or hoard presents. To our gladness, other families have started to do this.
- We give some of our money away to the global poor, tell our kids about it, and explain why we do it.
- When they are older, we will describe how we regularly share our budget with other Christians who are also passionate about advancing God's kingdom and caring for the poor.

Those are just some of the ways in which we live. By no means am I suggesting that we've got this thing down. In many ways, I hope you outdo my wife and me. But I mention it because in parenting, you pass on and role model what you value most. I mention it also because it helps to be quite specific. We value the life and love of Christ in ourselves and in our children.

Jesus is the treasure in heaven we value. Every other commodity cannot be owned or consumed by multiple people at once. Jesus can be stored up by all. We want to be rich in his life and love, and we want others to be rich in him as well.

From Judging to Healing

Matthew 7:1 – 6

¹ Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ² For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. ³ Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. ⁶ Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel's Exile:* The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- *The Kingdom of God:* The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called 'the kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God'. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans. Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human nature, which he had to accomplish first in himself (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), and then in his followers. Jesus had just announced 'the kingdom of heaven' (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations.
- *Jesus' Transformation of the Human Heart:* Recall that in Matthew 5:1 – 16 Jesus was describing how his process of transforming people will have a certain kind of influence in the world. In this section, called The Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:28), Jesus is laying out his transformation of the human heart.

Questions

1. In v.1 – 2, what does it mean to be ‘judgmental’ in the way Jesus is talking about here?
 - a. Judgment seems to involve a moral and relational distancing from another person. You look down on them. You use their lower position to bolster your own false sense of identity.
 - b. Note: Jesus may mean more by this than what I highlight here. But what seems clear is that God will really judge each person by the ‘standards’ that s/he professes, no matter what they are. He won’t even use His own standard, but the ones we have used against other people. Consider Paul’s sequence of case studies of humanity in Romans 1:21 – 3:8: first the idolatrous control freak in 1:21 – 32, then the moral judgmental person in 2:1 – 16, then the Jew who claims to live by the Mosaic Law in 2:17 – 3:8. His point there is the same. God will judge us by the standards of measure by which we have judged others. On our own, we will not measure up to those standards. We will fail miserably. For as we grew up, we mostly developed our real standards of judgment defensively to try to control other people by guilt, fear, or anxiety. Only secondarily did we apply them to ourselves. By that time, we probably already broke those standards. Or we overlook our own shortcomings and make exceptions for ourselves time and again. Jesus is our way out of that vicious cycle. In reality, we are all in need of him. That is the only fair judgment.
 - c. Somehow the ‘measure’ (whether a cup or yardstick) that we use for others is what we will be able to experience with God. If we are short with other people, we will experience God as being short with us.
 - d. In specific, however, it’s a little unclear until you get to v.3 – 5.
2. In v.3, Jesus talks about judging ‘your brother.’ Do you think it’s significant that Jesus is speaking of the ‘brother’ in particular?
 - a. Notice that when Jesus talked about anger in 5:21 – 26, he referred to the ‘brother.’ It did seem to be significant there.
 - b. Perhaps this is because we judge people who we know better, who are closer to us, who we have more expectations for, or who we are more directly affected by.
 - c. Perhaps it is easiest to judge other Christians, since they are supposed to be living by the same teaching we are, which Jesus just spelled out in 5:1 – 6:34. This might explain the ‘dogs’ and ‘pigs’ reference in v.6. Dogs and pigs might be Jewish language for ‘Gentile outsiders.’
 - d. Who are the people we find it easiest to judge?
3. Why are the speck and the log so disproportionate to Jesus? How come Jesus says it’s easy to have a log in our own eye?
 - a. How does it feel to have a speck in your eye? It hurts. This might be a person who wants to get it out. They might also not be that self-aware (aware of the speck), too, but we might see the symptoms of an irritation or a problem with the way they are seeing. In this sense, the motif of the eye is very important (see also 5:8 and 6:19 – 24)
 - b. A log skews our perception of others; it hurts others; it prevents us from getting close to others. And we do damage to others when we get close to them.
4. What is the log?
 - a. I think it is judgmentalism itself. Judgmentalism is a sense of pride and superiority that is rooted in a thought like, ‘You and I are really different.’ It results in the judger emotionally distancing herself or himself from the other person judged.
 - b. The person with a log can really hurt others. Imagine a baseball bat.
5. How do we help take a speck out of another person’s eye?
 - a. Note: Jesus is using parabolic language. In reality, the other person is also removing the speck from their own eye. And this might take a long time if there is a deep issue in their life. But let’s stay within the language for now.
 - b. It’s vulnerable for anyone to let you touch their eye!
 - c. It implies that the other person trusts you to some degree
 - d. In what ways has Jesus used others to ‘remove a speck’ in your eye to help you grow spiritually? What can we all learn from that?
 - i. Illus: When a mentor did this with me, he told me gently that I could speak to other Christians as if they were on my side, and not against me. I realized that I held uncharitable assumptions about other people, especially other Christians.
 - e. How can we let Jesus use us to heal when we’re tempted to judge?
 - i. By having his perspective – he sees through the fault to the need in other people.

- ii. By creating hospitable emotional spaces for others.
 - iii. By empathizing with others' struggles, and sharing from our own lives how Jesus helped us remove an irritant from our life.
 - iv. Illus: When I did this with a friend of mine, I told her that I was concerned that she has this pattern of running away from her problems, rather than taking them to Jesus. I shared my own story of running away from my own problems.
 - v. With some people, what has helped is asking people to interpret themselves better so other people know where they are coming from. For example, I said to a Christian who was slowly getting over drug addictions, 'Just explain to people where you've come from. Everyone should be able to understand that you're on a journey of healing. We all are.' Or to another Christian, 'Just explain to people that you're from the South, and the friendships between men and women there are a little more formal than other places. So what seems a little too casual and flirtatious to you might just be your culture, and not a moral issue. But it still matters to you as something to talk about.'
 - f. If you're in a concrete situation right now, think and pray through what level of trust there is, whether the other person is inviting you to comment on their life, and whether Jesus has any specific timing for this person.
6. Why v.6? How does that connect?
- a. Pearls are formed in oysters when a grain of sand gets in between their shells. It's an irritant, so the oyster covers over the sand with layers of pearly material, and forms a pearl. A pearl is something that begins as an irritant, and then becomes something beautiful. That's how Jesus shapes our story: he takes a pain in us and covers it over and it becomes something beautiful. It has some resemblance to the speck in the eye.
 - b. Probably because when we empathize with others' struggles, but they are not self-aware or regard it as a struggle, it means we become overly vulnerable ourselves. If someone isn't really ready to hear that, it might come back to hurt us.
 - c. Dogs and pigs are typically Jewish references to Gentiles and unbelievers. But in this context, Jesus is probably referring not strictly to non-Christians but rather to those who are self-destructive and not able to appreciate the delicate parts of your life that involve Jesus healing you. He may also be referring to people in certain situations.
 - i. Illus: When I worked at Intel, and was going to get married in May 1999, a group of guys at work took me out to lunch. They made some jokes about women and wives that weren't that flattering to women categorically. As the conversation went on, they increased their sarcasm. I wasn't sure what to do. I could recognize that they felt insecure about some things and thought they could sound strong by disparaging the women in their lives. And I could understand that myself, since Jesus addressed those things in me. But I didn't think it was the right time to share deeper 'pearls' about Jesus healing me in that context. At least in that context, those guys would not have received it.
7. Application: It's a lot easier to either judge someone or avoid him/her. It's a lot harder to care enough to participate in their spiritual healing. Is there someone in your life that you've been judging or avoiding, but not contributing to their healing? Ask the Lord to give you a softer heart, and insight into your own self related to how the other person might be struggling. Close in prayer for yourself and that person.

Optional Case Study

Jesse Alexander Helms, Jr. (October 18, 1921 – July 4, 2008) was a five-term Republican United States Senator from North Carolina. But his first career was that of a journalist. He was the executive vice president of Raleigh-based Capitol Broadcasting Company, and gave daily news editorials against the Civil Rights Movement, against anti-war churches, and against liberal news media companies. He called UNC Chapel Hill, the University of Negroes and Communists and suggested that a wall be built around the campus so the rest of the State would not be infected by the university's liberal views. He became a Senator, running on a pro-segregation, anti-Civil Rights platform, among other things. He tried to block the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. He put up a 16-day filibuster on the Senate floor to try to stop the approval of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a federal holiday. In the 1980's, he went so far as to be against Food Stamps, but the outcry against his proposal was so great he was compelled to back down. He had *supported* the Apartheid regime in South Africa. He served as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from 1995 to 2001 and was one of the biggest opponents of foreign aid to poor countries, including AIDS relief in Africa. That's when Jesus sent a rock star named Bono to his office.

In 2002, just before he retired from the Senate, Helms agreed to meet with the rock star Bono, one of the world's leading advocates for fighting the AIDS epidemic in Africa. Let me tell you where he stood on it before meeting with Bono. Senator Helms had spent years slashing foreign aid budgets. And on AIDS in particular, he had told *The New York Times* in 1995 that the government should spend less money on people with AIDS because HIV was punishment for homosexuality; those people got sick as a result of 'deliberate, disgusting, revolting conduct.' But after talking to Bono, Helms apologized and said he was ashamed. 'I have been too lax too long in doing something really significant about AIDS,' Helms said.

What did Bono tell him? One point of discussion was how in Africa, AIDS is spread by heterosexuals and leaves many innocent orphans in its wake. But another point of discussion was what Jesus actually said, according to the Gospel of Matthew. 'Christ only speaks about judgment once and it's not about sex but about how we deal with the poor, and I quoted Matthew, 'I was naked and you clothed me, I was hungry and you fed me.' Jesse got very emotional, and the next day he brought in the reporters and publicly repented about AIDS. I explained to him that AIDS was like the leprosy of the New Testament.'⁹ In the last year of his life he became a huge advocate of aid, especially for health initiatives.

Questions

1. Is this how you would have approached Senator Jesse Helms?
2. What were some other ways of approaching him?

⁹ Madeleine Bunting, 'Bono Talks of US Crusade.' *The Guardian* (16 June 2005) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/jun/16/g8.usa>> (23 November 2005).

The Great Choice

Matthew 7:7 – 29

⁷ Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good [the Holy Spirit]¹⁰ to those who ask Him! ¹² In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

¹³ Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

¹⁵ Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷ So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So then, you will know them by their fruits. ²¹ Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'

²⁴ Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall.' ²⁸ When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at his teaching; ²⁹ for he was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel's Exile*: The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- *The Kingdom of God*: The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called 'the kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God'. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans.

¹⁰ Luke 11:13 supplies 'Holy Spirit' in place of Matthew's 'what is good.' Both were likely variants of an oft-repeated phrase of Jesus. In the Old Testament, the hope for God's Spirit to indwell people was another way of speaking of the hope that God would change human hearts (Ezk.36:26 – 36), speech (Num.11:25; Joel 2:28 – 29), lives (Isa.32:15; 44:3; Ezk.37:1 – 14) and forge a new, faith-filled humanity.

Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human nature, which he had to accomplish first in himself (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), and then in his followers. Jesus had just announced ‘the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations.

- *Jesus’ Transformation of the Human Heart:* Recall that in Matthew 5:1 – 16 Jesus was describing how his process of transforming people will have a certain kind of influence in the world. In this section, called The Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:28), Jesus is laying out his transformation of the human heart.

Questions

1. Let's take this step by step. How does the 'Holy Spirit' in 7:11 (who is the personal 'good' that God gives us) relate to the 'Golden Rule' of 7:12? Is the Holy Spirit necessary for us to live out the Golden Rule?
 - a. When we as followers of Jesus deal with our own sin seriously, it improves our friendships. Then we expect others to treat us in the same way. Our bar has been raised. Our standards get higher. So the disappointment can be greater when they don't. Or if they are not Christians and don't take gossip as seriously as we do, etc. That's one big reason why we need Jesus' Spirit. Jesus calls us to treat them as we would like to be treated, and how we'd like to be treated has been raised to a new level.
 - b. Think of what Jesus has just taught about in 5:1 – 7:6. To have someone care about the anger we feel and care about reconciling with us (5:21 – 26), the lust we struggle with (5:27 – 30), to keep their word with us (5:33 – 37), to love us even when we are pissy and enemy-like and unforgiving (5:38 – 48), to be served without having our gratitude and response demanded (6:1 – 18), to be valued above any monetary amount (6:19 – 34), to not be judged but helped and cheered for in our own healing (7:1 – 6). That is what Jesus assumes we *want*. Now he calls us to treat *others* that way.
 - c. We have obligations to others that we can't meet on our own, because the way we want to be treated exceeds our capacity to treat others in the same way. That's the deepest reason why we need Jesus' Spirit.
 - d. Leader illustrate either a moment of spiritual failure in loving others, or a moment of spiritual success when the Spirit did empower you and you followed.
2. How does that relate to the narrow gate of v.13 – 14?
 - a. Is the narrow gate the way to God? Or the way to being truly human? Both, but most Christians have usually heard about it being the way to God. Jesus' emphasis is on being truly human, according to his definition.
 - b. Jesus is the narrow gate because he is the only way to receive his own Spirit.
 - c. Why do few 'find' it? It's not because Jesus hides himself from some people. It's because some don't care to look that hard.
3. What's the difference between false prophets and true disciples, in v.15 – 23?
 - a. It's connected to a person's very being. A good tree produces good fruit. A bad tree bad fruit.
 - b. The bad fruit is not even really 'fruit'! It's just thorns and thistles. Where in Scripture do you see thorns and thistles? In Genesis 3, after the fall of humanity. It's not life-giving to others. That's what our sin is. But bearing real fruit for Jesus is life-giving to others.
 - c. What might it mean for me to be an imposter? To talk to others about Jesus without not allowing him to actually change my heart? I could tell others to give away their money, while hoarding money myself, or even taking theirs. In that case, there would be a deep inner hypocrisy that would eventually be seen in my bank account or expensive habits. I could tell others to seek their sense of self-worth from God, while feeding my hunger for approval from other people. In that case, I would become possessive about people, paranoid about their loyalty to me, and jealous if they are influenced by any other Christians.
 - d. Imposters are able to prophesy and teach in Jesus' name. They are able to cast out demons and perform miracles of healing in Jesus' name. I suppose Judas Iscariot was able to do these things, too. From an external point of view, their ministries could be quite 'successful.' They might be impressive and influential, at least for a season. Yet deep within these people is a hungry, evil place that they have not allowed Jesus to touch. They crave forms of approval, legitimacy, respect, comfort, and security. And rather than bring all that ravenousness to Jesus, they let those desires motivate them to a type of greatness.
 - e. When they meet Jesus, they will attempt to justify themselves. That much is apparent from v.22. They might also try to compare themselves to others, saying, 'We did greater things than other people did for you. Why don't you acknowledge us?'
 - f. Jesus will say that he never 'knew' them. It's not that Jesus did not know about them. He didn't experientially know them. That is, he didn't participate in them, because they never welcomed him into the very deepest places of their being. Now their own ravenous desires for approval, acclaim, and power show in the face of Jesus himself. They never yielded to his law; they 'who practice lawlessness.' Their own untamed nature is now incompatible with Jesus.
 - g. Allowing Jesus to transform our hearts is absolutely necessary.

4. What's the difference between a foolish man building his foundation on sand and a wise man building on a rock, in v.24 – 28?
 - a. It takes more up front work to build on rock! You have to dig deeper, and it takes more effort. That's what it's like to dig into your own heart and allow Jesus to go deep there. It's painful. But your faith will stand when adversity comes.
 - b. Building on sand is foolish because it's a façade of a structure, like a shallow spiritual life: it's a façade.
 - c. Application: What are your ways right now of internalizing Jesus' word and letting it go deep? Anything you want to make more frequent or reevaluate?
 - d. Application: If someone asks you, 'Can't we be good without Jesus?' then I would suggest you respond and say, 'The real question is whether I can be good without Jesus, and whether you can be good without Jesus. Can we read Matthew 5 – 7 together and look at what Jesus calls *good*, because I don't think anyone can do this without Jesus.'

If it comes up: Why do we need Jesus and his Spirit anyway? Can't we just be good on our own? Live the Golden Rule on our own?

- Reply #1: Read Matthew 5:1 – 7:6 again and tell me whether this is possible for you to do by yourself.
- Reply #2: You are mistaking Christian morality for the larger, grander purpose for which we were created: living in deep intimacy with God in Christ and by the Spirit. Yes, it is true that God Himself starts to change us from the inside as He cares for us and loves us and heals us. But it's also true, as we will see later in Matthew, that Jesus can be present in our lives in ways that are far beyond the 'moral' dimension, i.e. the miraculous, the missional, and the personal.
- Reply #3: Not really. Being 'good' on your own is not the same as receiving life from Jesus. Because not only will we lower Jesus' standards in order to meet something manageable, if we become relativists, we will also lose the foundation by which to influence others in a challenging moral direction.

An excerpt:

Some argue, 'What about better education? Okay. I get that human beings need to be changed. But why can't it just be a change in our education? Our mindset? Why do we need *Jesus*?' I hear those questions a lot, too. Working on college campuses in the liberal northeast of the U.S., I have to consider that. Certainly I'm in favor of good education. But I still think that we need Jesus to heal and transform us – all of us.

Take the campus itself. If the college campus is supposed to be so effective at moral education, then why do 10% to 25% of women in college get raped? In fact, 90% of the victims know the men who rape them.¹¹ Alcohol or drugs are frequently used to intoxicate women, especially in fraternity houses, to make them more susceptible to sexual coercion. Sadly, up to 40% of rape victims develop sexually transmitted diseases.¹² Looking beyond the U.S., we find that 'rape is common worldwide, with relatively similar rates of incidence across countries, with 19%-28% of college women reporting rape or attempted rape in several countries.'¹³ That's not counting attempted rape, attempted coercion, verbal pestering, being stalked, and unwanted sexual contact more generally. The fact that Tufts University in 2009 had to make a residential life policy that you couldn't have sex in your room while your roommate was there, nor could you 'sexile' your roommate (exiling him or her so that you could have sex),¹⁴ means that respect and conflict resolution skills have been deteriorating. This is happening at the campus – the very institution that is supposed to be shaping people's moral lives for the better, the very place that notions of good and evil, right and wrong should be taking root in people's hearts and minds.

Furthermore, the campus is effective at producing careerists, but not at producing people who use their professions and lives for higher goals. For example, despite what pre-law students say about wanting to do pro-bono work or civil rights law, most go into corporate law. This is strongly suggested by Katchadourian and Boli, *Cream of the Crop: The Impact of Elite Education in the Decade After College*, in 1994, and by Page Smith, *Killing*

¹¹ The 10% figure comes from U.S. Department of Justice, *The Sexual Victimization of College Women*, 2000 found at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/182369.pdf>; the 25% figure comes from Warshaw, *I Never Called it Rape*, 1994, referenced at http://www.crisisconnectioninc.org/sexualassault/college_campuses_and_rape.htm

¹² American Association of University Women, <http://www.suite101.com/content/college-students-sexual-violence-a26356>

¹³ M.P. Koss, L. Hiese, and N. F. Russo. 'The Global Health Burden of Rape.' *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 18 (1994): p.509 – 37, <http://www.oneinfourusa.org/statistics.php>

¹⁴ Laura Batchelor, 'Tufts University: no sex in room while roommate is present', *CNN*, September 30, 2009, see http://articles.cnn.com/2009-09-30/us/tufts.sex.roommate_1_roommate-sexual-activity-tufts-university?_s=PM:US

the Spirit: Higher Education in America, in 1990. Since college educations cost so much, and graduate school even more, and since people want to maximize their investment in themselves, the emotions that reign on campus are anxiety, fear, greed, and self-centeredness. Naturally, most students will work hard and then choose money-making ventures. Where is the university's moral case for calling students to live for more than themselves? How successful has their rhetoric been? Not very, and increasingly weaker. In an age of moral relativism, the secular university puts forward a weak moral case, if any at all.

Secular American culture has promoted 'reason' to shape behavior and curb human evil. But has it worked? 'As an alternative to tradition, the United States has proposed reason. Educate citizens and inform them, and they can be counted on to behave sensibly – this is the Jeffersonian-Enlightenment faith on which the United States was founded. It has not been fulfilled. Until recently the world's leader in education, the United States leads likewise in crime, delinquency, and divorce.'¹⁵

This gets to the heart of the problem. Education has, at times, become a handmaiden to evil and injustice. Because of the Enlightenment, Europeans thought they were smarter than everyone else in the world; that led to European imperialism. Smart people can help with some things. But are they 'the answer'? Author William Golding offers an insight into human nature true to the Jewish prophets of old:

“There isn't anyone to help you. Only me. And I'm the Beast...Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!” said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. ‘You knew, didn't you? *I'm part of you?* Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go. Why things are what they are?’¹⁶

And former Fed chairman Alan Greenspan delivered a depressing verdict on the economic crisis of 2008 – 09.

‘It's *human nature*, unless somebody can find a way to change human nature, we will have more crises and none of them will look like this because no two crises have anything in common, except *human nature*.’¹⁷

¹⁵ Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (Harper Collins: San Francisco, 1958), p.163

¹⁶ William Golding, *The Lord of the Flies*, p.130 – 131

¹⁷ Alan Greenspan, Market Crisis ‘Will Happen Again’, *BBC*, September 2009

Chapter 4: Doing Evangelism with the New Humanity Paradigm

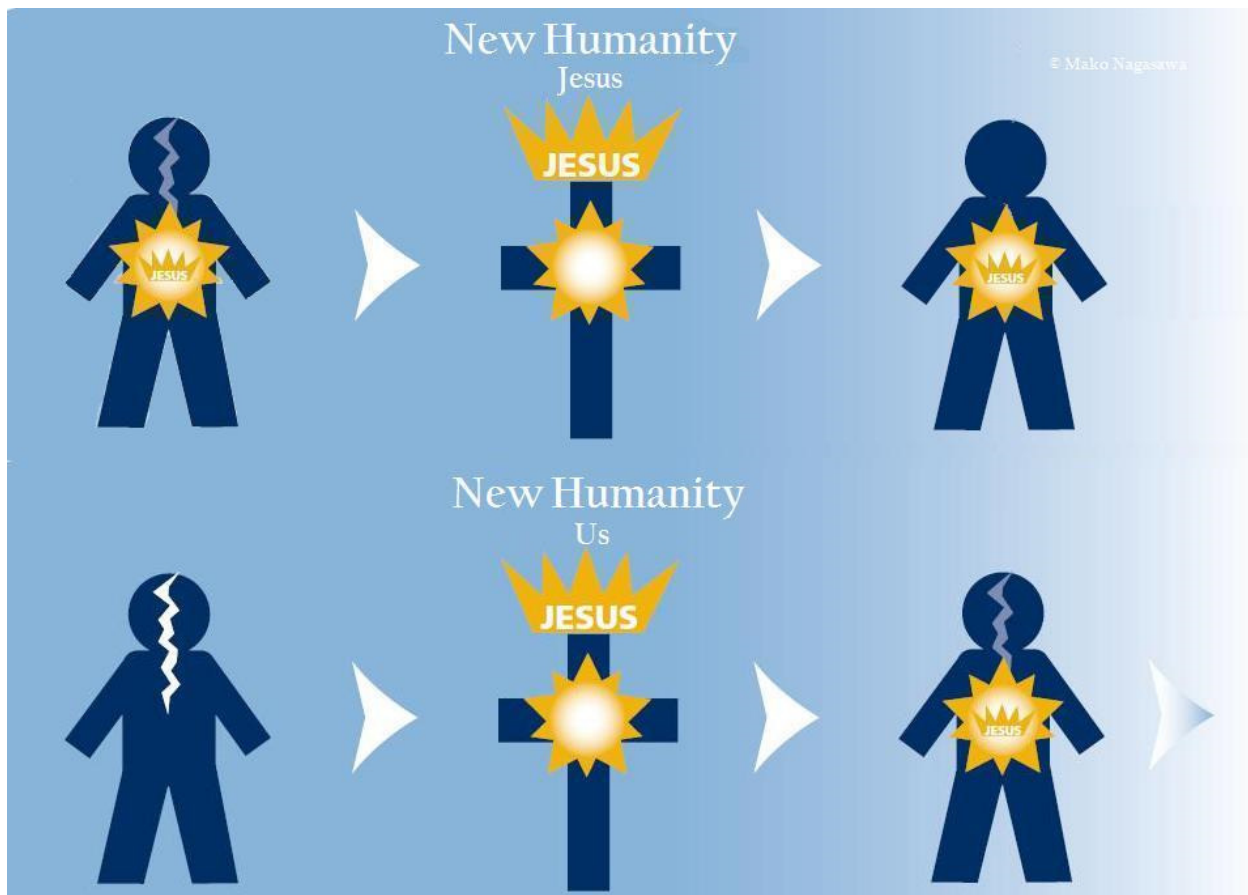
‘This emphasis on Jesus as God’s new humanity has made him so much more relatable... I never really understood how Jesus undid all the sins and evil within the nature of human beings. In many ways, Jesus’ death had made me feel guilty, because I found that I was so unworthy to have Jesus suffer on behalf of my sins. However, understanding how Jesus conquered sin through healing humanity during his life and finally conquering the greatest evil of death, I now see his act on the cross as a moment of triumph.’

— Danielle Chung, Boston College, class of 2010

The New Humanity Diagrams

Diagrams can often help us communicate important things. This is what I call the ‘new humanity’ paradigm that flows out of the earliest, oldest theology of the church. I find that this paradigm flows nicely from the Gospel of Matthew (as well as all the New Testament writings).

The top line helps us tell *Jesus’* story. The bottom line helps us tell *our* story. Let me tell you how I use these diagrams. Then later, if you’re interested, you can read about where this comes from, and why I use them to present Jesus to other people.



Jesus' Story (Top Line)

- **Left (incarnation, life):** The Son of God became human as Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus took to himself a broken human nature, symbolized by the crack running down the human figure. He did this to fight the corruption and brokenness in his own human nature. But he never sinned. Within himself, Jesus poured out the wrath of God upon that brokenness that was in him. He bent his human nature back into the love of the Father.
- **Center (death, resurrection):** Jesus died and rose again. Ultimately through his death on the cross, he killed the corruption and brokenness in himself, overcoming its final resistance. In his resurrection, he became God's new humanity.
- **Right (resurrection, Spirit):** Jesus now has a God-drenched, God-soaked, God-cleansed, God-healed, God-purified, and God-perfected new humanity. That's why there is no crack left in him. He has become what God always wanted for human beings: to bear God's glory from within himself. He can share his new humanity with us by his Spirit if we just ask him. But we have to agree with him that we need him to heal our human nature.
- *Invitation: Do you want Jesus to heal and transform you?*

Jesus' Story: Tips for Telling It

- *Study Matthew 3:13 – 4:11* if you haven't yet. That passage will really start to help you see how Jesus takes the same fallen human nature we have, and start to change it.
- *Reflect on Romans 6:1 – 11* as another example of how Jesus saves us from *ourselves*. Or more precisely, Jesus saves us from *the corruption within ourselves*.
- *Consider* analogies and stories. Here are a few I often tell along the way:
 - Jesus is like a blood donor. All of us have a poison in our bodies, a disease called evil or self-centeredness. We need healing from it. The reason why God became a human being – why the Word became flesh – was to *acquire our disease*. That is the entire punishment Jesus took on. To have the disease that coursed through his veins, and fight it at every moment. In the physical body of Jesus, God resisted every shred of self-centeredness living in that body, pushing it all the way to sits death. He *cleansed that humanity* and crucified the resistance. And by raising Jesus from the dead, God gave Jesus a fresh, new humanity perfectly fused with the divine. Jesus is our blood donor spiritually. When we entrust our lives to him, he joins himself to us by his Spirit.
 - Jesus is like *Harry Potter*. When Harry Potter was 1 year old, the most powerful evil wizard of all time, the Dark Lord Voldemort, killed Harry's mother and father. But when Voldemort cast a killing curse on Harry, it rebounded back onto Voldemort. The reason it didn't kill Harry was because Harry's mother had sacrificed herself first, and thus given a magical protection to Harry. The reason it didn't kill Voldemort was because Voldemort had already split his soul into objects outside his own body, and had achieved a kind of immortality in a very

evil way. Voldemort becomes re-embodied, regathers his army, and starts to take over the wizarding world again. This time, Harry is commissioned to fight the Dark Lord. In book 7, Harry and his friends Ron and Hermione have to find the objects in which Voldemort put pieces of his soul, to destroy them. But Harry discovers that he has a piece of Voldemort's soul *in him*. It got implanted by mistake when Voldemort tried to kill him as a 1 year old. That piece of soul is what caused Harry great pain. And the only way for Harry to destroy that piece of Voldemort's soul is for Harry to die, at the hands of Voldemort himself. And so, Harry goes to face Voldemort, and to die. In order for Harry Potter to defeat the evil of his day, he had to die because there was a part of the evil in him. Similarly, in order for Jesus to defeat the evil in humanity, he had to die because there was a part of that evil in him. But he never gave into it; in fact he fought it every moment of his life, and it was a heroic struggle.

- Jesus is like Frodo, in *The Lord of the Rings*: The moment Jesus entered into the womb of Mary is like the moment Frodo took hold of the Ring of Power. It wasn't just this neutral thing. It tried to take him over. The same thing is true with Jesus when he took fallen human nature to himself. It fought with him. It tried to take him over. It tried to make him as self-centered as we are. But he never let it. And Jesus couldn't just put down some object like the Ring. It was part of him. He couldn't say, 'Hey, where's my Sam??? Can't I give this to someone else?' But he resisted the flesh, every moment, at the source, all the way to the end. He never sinned – in action, and further upstream in emotion, and further upstream in thought, at the very source of his will where he gave himself to the love of the Father. And unlike Frodo, who gave into temptation and kept the Ring, Jesus cast his struggling humanity 'into the fire,' so to speak.
- If you'd like others, I keep a list of illustrations here:
<http://www.anastasiscenter.org/preachers-corner-illustrations>.

Exercise: Talk to one other person about this. It will probably lead to good conversations about human nature, good and evil, whether Jesus was real, etc. I'll give more help on those things below.

Our Story (The Bottom Line)

- Left (before Jesus): I was created by God to reflect Him. But I am corrupted and broken, symbolized by the crack running down the stick figure.
- Center (coming to Jesus): Jesus invited me to die and rise with him. Coming to Jesus was challenging, but good. Jesus said it would feel that way. He said that everyone who comes to him and follows him must take up their cross and deny themselves, but he who loses his life for Jesus' sake will find it in him (Mt.16:24 – 25).
- Right (with Jesus): Now, Jesus lives in me by his Spirit. He shares with me his new humanity. So he is healing me, retelling my story (see notes for Matthew 3:13 – 4:11), and shaping my life to look more like his. The crack is still there, but I'm not defined by

it. Jesus defines me instead. And the arrow to the right of that represents the fact that my story is not over. Jesus will one day heal all things, including me.

Our Story: My Transformation Story as Example

- **Left (before Jesus):** When Jesus came into my life, he began to re-tell my story and re-live my story to undo patterns of sin in my life. The most powerful instance of this was during the summer after my junior year of college. That was the time my parents finally decided to get their divorce. My dad's drinking had escalated to an alarming place. Now my way of dealing with my family, ever since 10th grade, was to leave. After I got my driver's license and my car keys, I was out of there. I'd go over to a park or to a friend's place to distract myself. I didn't even have a thought for my younger sister, who was four years younger than me, who I left at home to deal with the mess I didn't want to deal with.
- **Center (coming to Jesus):** But that summer, I felt Jesus say to me, 'I want you to stay.' I said to him, 'I don't have the strength to do that. If what you said is true, Jesus, then you need to be here in me, living your life out through me.' And he did. My parents couldn't afford a lawyer, so they had me arbitrate who gets what. I remember going into that time saying, 'I can't do this!'
- **Right (with Jesus):** But during that time, Jesus filled me with a sense of his love for me. And he gave me his love for my parents. I was able to listen sensitively to both of them. In fact, every other time before that, my response to them was, 'You have to stay together – for my sake' or 'You have to get a divorce – for my sake.' But I had never considered it for their sakes. Jesus helped me separate myself from my parents' marriage so they could make a decision that was best for them. Jesus gave me his love for my parents. He gave me his strength to stay at home. He gave me insights so I could counsel my sister with what she was feeling. At the end of that summer, I was talking to my friend Malcolm, whose family had gone through a similar thing earlier. I told him what I was experiencing and how I was meeting Jesus throughout it all, and he said these words to me that I'll never forget: 'Mako, how can you be so other-centered at a time like this?' I treasure those words as a reminder to me of the difference Jesus makes.

Our Story: Tips for Telling It

- Is this my conversion story or transformation story? *Transformation story.*
- I meet many who say, 'But I gave my life to Jesus at age 5, then 6, then 7, and every year until I was 15! How did I tell that story?' *But this isn't about your conversion story necessarily. It could be. It's about structuring your transformation story (or stories).*
- **Personal note:** Since I came to Jesus at age 17 from a non-Christian family, I have a clear conversion story that is also one of my transformation stories. But if you notice, I told a transformation story that spanned about 6 years of my life. My healing and transformation, while very real, was not instantaneous.
- So don't stress out if you are from a Christian family and grew up in the church. Your transformation story is about what it's like to bring a sin issue in your life (like your anger, your way of treating the opposite sex, your dislike for a certain kind of person, your impatience, your greed, or whatever your particular form of selfishness was) to

Jesus. Talk about what you were like before you brought that issue to Jesus. Talk about what it was like to bring it to Jesus and surrender; that will feel both challenging (because it's a real letting go of something you want to control) and good (because Jesus will give you a new love, power, freedom, and direction). Talk about what you are like now with Jesus (hopefully you're changed in some way, even though you're not perfected yet!).

- If you are telling a non-Christian person your transformation story, be aware that this is what s/he needs to know about what giving their life to Jesus will feel like, and possibly look like.
- If you feel like you are still waiting for and longing for more change to happen in your life, that's okay too. Just say so.

Exercise: Talk to one other Christian person about this. Ask the person to help you be a better story teller, eliminate details that are distracting, and stick to one theme. Then, pray for the Lord to give you the awareness for opportunities to tell your story, and courage do it!

Deeper Conversation: Other Belief Systems Compared with Christian Faith

With this 'new humanity' framework, you can also understand how other religions or worldviews would compare. A helpful framework that I've used is to look at the implicit or explicit 'story' told by each belief. We all understand stories because we watch movies, read books, and tell stories. Belief systems also tell a story. So this is an easy way to talk about belief systems.

Not a Happy Ending Story

The first question is: Is there a happy ending or not? By this, I mean not just for the individual person, but for the whole world. If there is, that means good triumphs over evil. If there is not a happy ending, then it means that good and evil exist in some sort of balance. Let's practice on movies, just to get our juices flowing. The following movies do not have a happy ending:

Up in the Air	Boys Don't Cry
The Social Network	Gangs of New York
Romeo and Juliet	Scarface
The Butterfly Effect	Atonement
The Departed	Moulin Rouge
Blood Diamond	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon
Pay It Forward	My Sister's Keeper

What do you feel when you watch movies like this? You may feel mad, like when my wife and I watched Clive Owen in *The International*, and the evil banks win in the end, despite all the efforts the heroes make to uncover the corruption. You may feel, 'Well, that was realistic.' You may also feel, 'How sad. That's depressing.' You may feel the same way when you listen to these songs:

Don't Stop Believing, by Journey
Changes, by Tupac

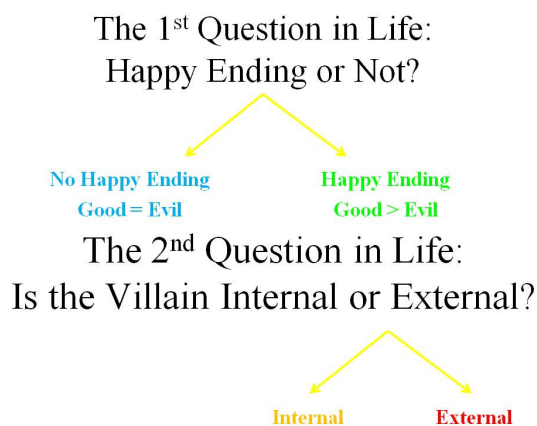
The Way It Is, by Bruce Hornsby
The End of the Innocence, by Don Henley
Fast Car, by Tracy Chapman

In high school, two of the books I read that really touched me were William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and John Knowles' *A Separate Peace*. Both of those books have a not-happy ending. They are poignant reflections on the state of the human heart and how they led to broken friendships, and even war. A story without a happy ending is one that seems to go on and on in the same way.

A Happy Ending Story

Movies with a happy ending, by contrast, make you feel hopeful, optimistic, and generally happy. Every Disney movie has a happy ending. If you have a plot line with the superhero who defeats the villain; the kids who stop the robbers; the guy and girl who hold out for each other and wind up together; the family that stays together through adversity; the natives who beat the invaders; the lawyer who persuades the jury of the truth; the scientist who beats the disease; the teacher who gets through to the kids and helps them pass the test. Those are all happy ending stories.

The second question is for those who believe in some kind of larger happy ending story. If good defeats evil, you have to know who or what is the villain. The villain in *Cinderella* is the Queen. The villain in *The Transformers* is Megatron and the Decepticons. These villains are external to the hero(es). Those kinds of stories are rather simple. However, in *Star Wars*, there are villains both external and internal to the hero, Luke Skywalker. The external villain is Darth Vader and Emperor Palpatine. The internal villain is Luke's own anger. He has to resist both. In the epic *The Lord of the Rings*, the villains are also both external and internal. The external villain is Sauron. The internal villain is that part of every person that is tempted to grasp the Ring and make it their own. These kinds of stories are more complex, because the battles take place both inside and outside the hero.



Maybe the better question is: *Where* is the villain? Is the villain *external* or *internal*? You can put that question to each worldview. By definition, happy ending stories must have a powerful villain that is defeated somehow. That's the plot twist, the high point of the story, the resounding climax.

Now it may interest you to know that most stories in most cultures in most times did not believe in a happy ending. If you could talk to those people, they would ask you, ‘Why would you think there is a happy ending for you?’ Just look out at the world. The sun rises, and then sets. The seasons come, and then go. People are born, and then they die. There is good, and there is evil. We do good, and we do evil. The most natural conclusion people can make about the world is that good will never triumph over evil; they will just always be there in a circular story without a happy ending.

Let’s get very specific, and look at one faith in particular: Hinduism. On Wikipedia (granted, it’s Wikipedia, but I cite this website because I actually show it to other people – as you will see, it does a lot of evangelism for me), there is an article called the *Problem of Evil in Hinduism*. Before it was changed, it used to say:

‘This shows the existence of earlier cycles of creation, and hence the number of creation cycles is beginningless. Thus Sankara’s [a Hindu commentator on the Vedas] resolution to the problem of injustice is that the existence of injustice in the world is only apparent, for one merely reaps the results of one’s moral actions sown in a past life...On the higher level of existence, however, *there is no evil or good*, since these are dependent mainly on temporal circumstances. Hence a jnani, one who has realized his true nature, *is beyond such dualistic notions.*’

Here’s the problem: If everything comes from the supreme Hindu god behind all the other gods, then that god is both good and evil, or more properly, neither. And if that is true, then there is no victory of good over evil because there is *no difference between good and evil* in the deepest reality of all; that difference is just our opinion. The sooner you get used to that challenging truth, according to Hinduism, the sooner you will understand reality. Reality cannot be changed. The sooner you come to accept that, the better. Then, you can one day individually escape the cycles of reincarnation and escape to nirvana. This universe will continue, but you as a person will basically cease to exist because you will become one with reality.

And here’s the deeper problem: A spirituality like that leads to an ‘accept-the-world-as-it-is’ posture. That is partly why the Hindu caste system resists change. You would not naturally have a ‘change-the-world’ posture towards evil, injustice, poverty, and so on if you were ‘beyond’ the dualistic notion that some things are good and some things are evil.

You might be surprised to know that in ancient times, everyone except the Jews believed in this kind of circular story. Historian Thomas Cahill, who writes to make history very accessible, puts it simply:

‘All evidence points to there having been, in the earliest religious thought, a vision of the cosmos that was profoundly cyclical. The assumptions that early man made about the world were, in all their essentials, little different from the assumptions that later and more sophisticated societies, like Greece and India, would make in a more elaborate manner. As Henri-Charles Puech says of Greek thought in his seminal *Man and Time*: ‘No event is unique, nothing is enacted but once...; every event has been enacted, is enacted, and

will be enacted perpetually; the same individuals have appeared, appear, and will appear at every turn of the circle.’ The Jews were the first people to break out of this circle, to find a new way of thinking and experiencing, a new way of understanding and feeling the world, so much that it may be said with some justice that theirs is the only new idea that human beings have ever had.’¹⁸

The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) was the first literature to expect a happy ending. Everyone else – the Hindu *Vedas* from India, Homer’s *Iliad* from Greece, the *Atrahasis Epic* from Babylon, the *Avesta* story from Persia – were all circular. All the modifications of Hinduism, like Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, are circular. If you could plot the story visually, it would be a circle. The Greek tragedies were based on this circular plot arc. You’re born, you die. Empires are born, and they also die. Everything goes back to where it came from. The way things were – the way things are – the way things will always be. Life is circular. There is no ultimate victory of good over evil.

Israel was different. The Jewish people alone had a linear perception of life. There are two reasons for this. First, they experienced their God as someone who made a promise, and then fulfilled it. That gave rise to a linear sense of history. You could mark things in time. All times are not the same. *God* makes things different. Second, they believed that their God was 100% good, and that He would ultimately triumph over evil. Good and evil were not equal entities or equal principles in the world. Therefore, they would not keep going around each other, cycling through forever in a yin and yang kind of pendulum. No, God would actually triumph over evil one day. And that period of history that all Jews hoped for, longed for, was called the Messianic period. It was the happy ending. Jewish monotheism, belief in one good God, created the idea of the happy ending.

But in every linear story, or hero story, or happy ending story, there is a problem that is overcome. What was the problem in the Jewish story?

- Every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Gen.6:5)
- The intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth (Gen.8:21)
- Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart (Dt.30:6)
- Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Ps.51:10)
- Circumcise yourselves to the LORD and remove the foreskins of your heart (Jer.4:4)... The sin of Judah is written down with an iron stylus; with a diamond point it is engraved upon the tablet of their heart (Jer.17:1)... The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick (Jer.17:9)... I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it (Jer.31:33)
- I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them (Ezk.11:19)... I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you (Ezk.36:26)

¹⁸ Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (Thorndike, ME: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p.13 – 14

Israel documented the problem: a corrupted human nature. It was an internal problem. The evil is in us. How did they discover that? Partly because they just looked around and asked, ‘Why do we keep screwing up?’ Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for example, were social critics. They looked at urban injustice, corruption, and oppression of the poor. They asked, ‘Why do we sin?’ Not because we need better circumstances: We’re in the promised land and it doesn’t get much better than this. Plus, it’s mostly the rich who commit these crimes, and do they need *better circumstances*? No, we can’t blame that external factor. Can we blame our laws? Do we have bad laws? No, we have God’s laws through Moses, and they’re pretty good. So we can’t blame that external factor either. The problem is not *external* to us – it’s *internal*. So Jeremiah and Ezekiel understood that the God of Israel would have to one day change their hearts. He would write His laws on their heart (Jer.31:33) and give them a new heart and a new Spirit (Ezk.36:26 – 36). In the view of this God, human nature had to be changed. The evil was in each human being.

Jesus inherited this diagnosis. He said, for instance, ‘Out of the heart comes evil...’ (Mt.15:18 – 20). In the Christian story, Jesus was God come in human form, meaning that he took human nature to himself. And he fought it from within, never giving into the self-centeredness and rebellion from God that we give into all the time. He crushed the corruption that was in his fallen human nature, and killed it and purged it out of his own body by crucifying it. If Frodo had succeeded in throwing the Ring of Power into the fires of Mount Doom on his own, we would have an analogy to Jesus throwing the fallen human nature into the judgment of God. Then Jesus rose again as a new kind of human being, a fresh, God-drenched, God-soaked human being that had transformed his own human nature. And he can share his Spirit – the Spirit of his new humanity – with anyone who asked, so they could be transformed in a relationship with him.

The old Jewish prophecies said that ‘out of Zion would come a message of salvation.’ Zion – or Jerusalem – would be the epicenter of a renewal that would ripple from Jesus across the whole world. God’s happy ending was dawning. Evil was defeated in the body of Jesus by Jesus’ moment by moment choices to never break his relationship with the Father by the Spirit, and he was sharing his new humanity with all who asked. Jesus sent his people into the whole world to proclaim a message that they were joined with him spiritually, and that anyone who wanted to be joined to him could be, by believing in him. And one day God will triumph over all evil (human and supernatural) when Jesus returns.

As evidence that Jesus really did change people, we can point to the fact that the early Christians were radicals for Jesus. They rescued babies left out on Roman doorsteps.¹⁹ They went into plague infested cities and cared for the sick and buried the dead.²⁰ And whenever a Roman army official waging war on someone else wanted to become a Christian, they would say, ‘That’s great, but you’re going to have to find a new job because Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, and we don’t think you can do that while you’re killing them.’²¹ All this was unheard

¹⁹ Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers’ Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p.99 writes, ‘Medical historians have pointed out, for instance, that the care of defective newborns simply was not a medical concern in classical antiquity. The morality of the killing of sickly or deformed newborns appears not to have been questioned until the birth of the Christian church. No pagan writer – whether Greek, Roman, Indian or Chinese – appears to have raised the question whether human beings have inherent value ontologically, irrespective of social value, legal status, age, sex and so forth. The first espousal of an idea of inherent human value in Western civilization depended on a belief that every human being was formed in the image of God.’

²⁰ William Hendrickson, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1962), p.144 – 5

²¹ Dale W. Brown, “Pacifism” in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, p. 645

of in the classical world, and it started what David Bentley Hart called ‘a revolution of the human.’²² When people realized that the Christian happy ending story was true, it unlocked a burst of courageous, loving energy. Aside from the supernatural power of the Spirit of Jesus indwelling people, the *story* was important. When you believe that there will be a happy ending, and that there is a way to jump on the hero’s side and not be the villain, you ask a whole set of new questions: What can I do to participate in that victory? How can I side more and more with the true hero? How can I battle my own inner weaknesses faithfully?

So to back up, the Messianic story was a story of two basic elements: (1) a suffering hero who (2) brings salvation to the whole world. From Jesus to the rest of humanity. From Jerusalem to the rest of the world. I want you to keep those two basic elements in mind, because we are now going to see what happened to that story.

Two movements started that were parodies of the Christian story: Islam and the European Enlightenment. The Islamic view of God is that God is too pure to touch humanity, which is corrupt. How this problem can be fundamentally resolved is inconsistent in the Qur’an. The Qur’an in Surah 94 says that God had to purify the prophet Mohammed’s heart before he could receive the revelation of the Qur’an. Two hadiths also say this (Sahih Muslim, Sahih al-Bukhari). But why does Mohammed get a free ticket to cleansing, while the rest of us need to work pretty hard to be cleansed, through reading the Qur’an, fasting, and all the other Muslim spiritual practices? And even Mohammed called himself a sinner, later in life (Qur’an 40:55; 48:2; 47:19; Bukhari’s Hadith 8:335, 379, 407, 408).²³ Did this affect his ability to speak truth? Was he cleansed again? Meanwhile, the Muslim God keeps an infinite distance from us. This means that the problem being dealt with is external to humanity: we don’t have the right laws. The Muslim God’s role is to give his divine law. We need to be informed and submit to Islam, and those laws are important because this is what human beings have to do. One day, the Muslim God will judge everyone and bring in the new age. Meanwhile, our role, in the Muslim story, is to receive the Muslim law and spread it.

The European Enlightenment also externalized the problem. Essentially, when the West started to reject Jesus himself, Western philosophers wanted to hold on to the happy ending, but without Jesus. After all, who wants to go back to a circular story? That’s boring, fatalistic, depressing, and repetitious. They didn’t want to go back there. So they kept a linear story, but changed the plot. The Enlightenment philosophers became story-tellers. Hegel told a story about conflicting ideas that merged with each other and culminated in his philosophy, which would spread to the whole world. Adam Smith told a story of how capitalism can and will produce wealth for all nations, starting in England and spreading to the rest of the world. Marx told a story of revolution and socialism, starting in England and spreading to the rest of the world. Social Darwinism told the story of European civilization becoming more and more complex, like life apparently, over time. So it became the ‘white man’s burden’ to ‘civilize’ the rest of the world. Freud and Nietzsche told the story of people in Europe realizing that God is dead, an idea which

²² David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), ch.10 – 15 provides ample historical information on how Christian faith stressed our common humanity and thus invented the human. See also my argument that human dignity has no other foundation, in Mako A. Nagasawa, *Human Dignity: Does Every Human Being Matter?* at <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/evil>

²³ For more information, see <http://www.answering-islam.org/Silas/mo-sinner.htm>

would then spread over the rest of the world, a world that was only primitive and superstitious. We protest those stories today, we argue with them, and yet we still live in them.

The poet T.S. Eliot wrestled with that. In 1922, after the devastation of World War I, people started to realize that the story that Europe told wasn't true. The story of European civilization bringing the world to a better place was shown to be a false story. So T.S. Eliot, for example, wrote *The Wasteland*, which many believe to be the greatest poem produced during the 20th century. No longer could people cling to this optimistic Enlightenment story that said evil is located in non-European styles of government and culture, and that the world just needed a little help from Europe...not when Europe itself lay in ashes. This is why I include political beliefs as having a religious quality, below, and why we will have to argue with them as well.

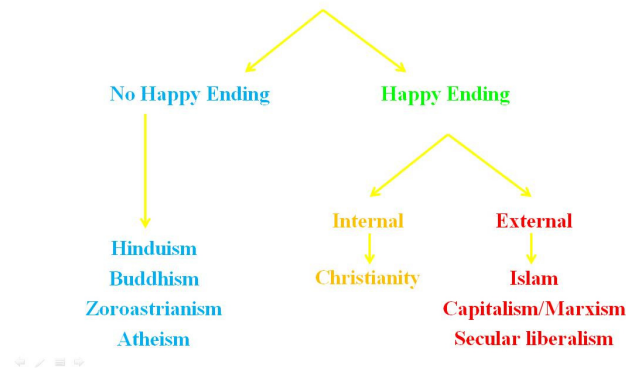
When you break it down this way, the choices become more clear. I break it down this way.

All Belief Systems



In belief systems without a happy ending, what happens through the course of time? Either the 'god' is both good and evil, and there are endless cycles of reincarnation with some kind of theoretical escape to nothingness for each person (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism), or there are two 'gods' – one good and one evil – who eternally battle each other without resolution (Zoroastrianism), or there is no god and therefore neither good nor evil but just the chaos of a universe running out of thermodynamic energy (atheism). Meanwhile, the stories with a happy ending can be divided into the one with an internal villain, primarily (Christianity) compared with those that define an external enemy, primarily: lack of divine law in the nation (Islam), lack of the right laws that will make for social progress (capitalism or Marxism), or antiquated religious dogma stifling individual rights (secular liberalism).

All Belief Systems



If you can understand the significance of those two questions, belief systems will become much clearer to you. And you'll understand a good deal of history and theology, too. Remember: the first question is, 'Is there a happy ending?' and the second question is, 'If there is a happy ending, then is the villain internal or external to us?'

I find that if you articulate Christian faith in its basic story form like this, people have a much easier time understanding it. If you compare it to other stories, they really get it. I think there is something in our hearts that yearns for a happy ending. But sometimes we resist owning up to the fact that we have an internal problem: sin, the corruption of our originally good human nature.

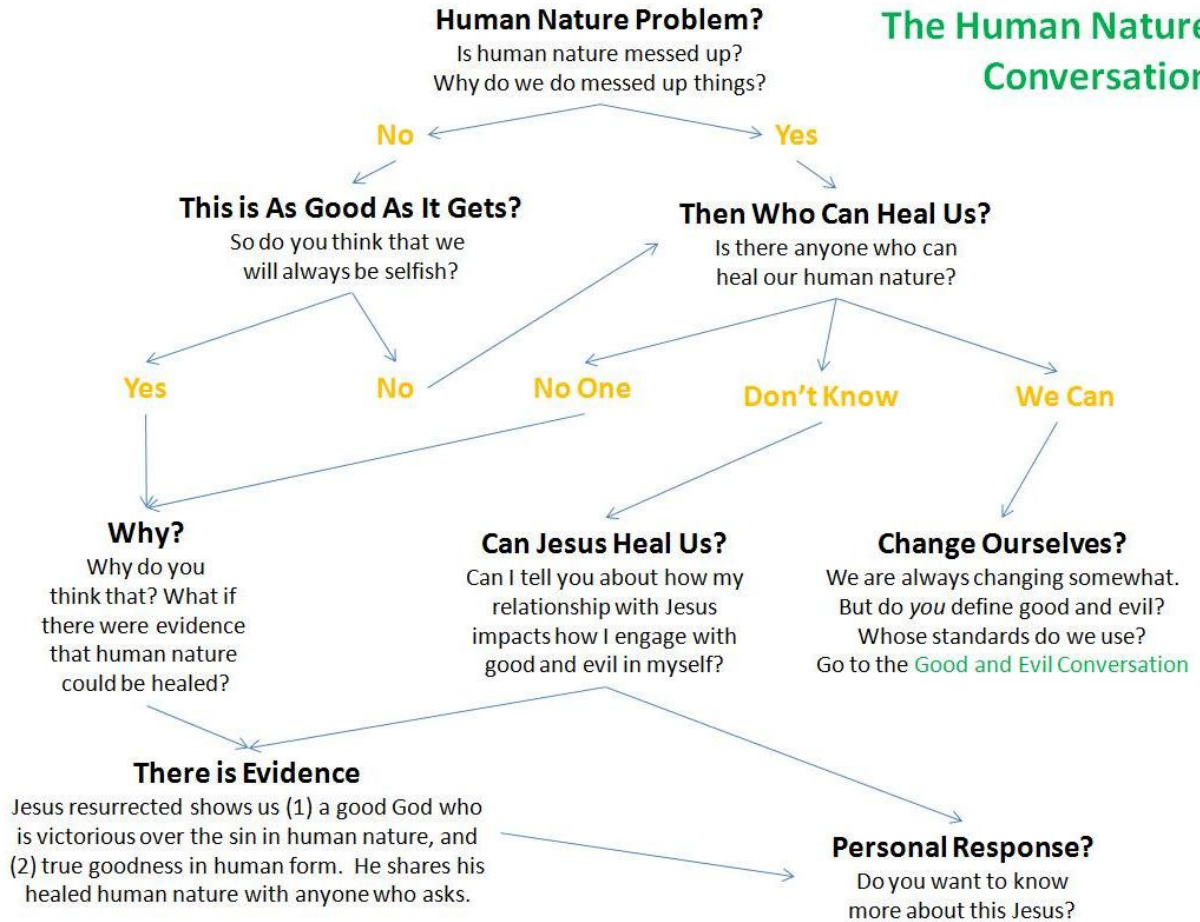
A good number of people have come to faith in Jesus this way. One young man was trying to explain these stories to another non-Christian, and he found himself wanting to believe the Christian story. A few days later, he gave his life to Jesus!

Deeper Conversations: The Human Nature Question

I want to help you go a little deeper with certain conversation areas. My most effective discussions with non-Christians have explored three topics: human nature, good and evil, and the character of God. I've drawn up a 'conversation tree' for each topic. They are interrelated, though. So it helps to be familiar with all three topics. These conversations are also posted to www.anastasiscenterblog.org.

Be mindful that I'm really just giving you a bare bones outline here. Be more personal than this in actual conversation. Use humor. Tell personal stories. But watch out for how I keep pressing other people to have a coherent story of good and evil, a clear location for the evil, and whether they can really live in the story they're telling me. I think that I can find big problems with other people's beliefs. If they come to realize those problems, sometimes they will question themselves or their current stance, and start being open to Jesus. Sometimes this is what we have to do before we explain Jesus to a person.

The Human Nature Conversation



Exercise: Role Play. One person role play a non-Christian. The other role play a Christian (or just be yourself). Have an intelligent conversation. Try to follow, generally, the flow of conversation here.

Here are abbreviated examples of real conversations I've had. See if you can follow the conversational path I followed. At times, I bring up a side argument or use some connection point with the other person. But then I try to come back into the main argument.

Conversation #1

Postmodern Skeptic: Even if Jesus was raised from the dead, so what? You think I need him...why?

Me: Because the only person who can offer us a healed human nature is Jesus. Why do you think we're messed up as people?

Postmodern Skeptic: Well, what makes you say we're messed up?

Me: Do you think we're okay? Why do we do so much evil?

Postmodern Skeptic: No, I guess we do kind of suck.

Me: Well, so doesn't that include you and me? I can tell you my epiphany story if you like.

Postmodern Skeptic: Sure, let's hear it.

Me: [testimony of transformation story]

Postmodern Skeptic: So you've told me your story. Do you think we're only evil? What about all the good that people already do?

Me: How do you define good?

Postmodern Skeptic: Not being selfish. It's realizing that we are all connected. I don't think we need religion or God to realize that.

Me: I think we do good because we were made in the image of a good God. The question is: Why do we do evil? And then the question is: Can Jesus heal our human nature?

Postmodern Skeptic: How do you know it was Jesus? Why not just connect with a 'force' like 'the force' in Star Wars?

Me: If the problem is cancer in the body, the solution must be antibodies that fight the cancer in the body. In the same way, if human nature really has a disease, the only solution for it must be a healed human nature. Some 'force' that floats out there can't be the solution to human nature. An actual human being in actual human history must perfect the antibodies to evil in his own body. We have to be able to see true goodness in human form and human life. Then he has to be able to spiritually connect with us. The only person able to do that is a God who is 100% good. That is why he came in the person of Jesus. Do you want to compare what you currently believe with Christian belief?

Conversation #2

Social Activist: So this sounds different than what I was taught when I grew up in church. I was taught that Jesus saves us from *God*, who is about to throw us into hell because He's pissed off. I thought Jesus was our 'get out of hell' card, our afterlife insurance.

Me: I'm aware of that kind of thing. What's your response to that?

Social Activist: Well it makes God seem more focused on the next world, and less on this one.

Me: Yeah, that never made much sense to me, either. I think God is focused on healing this world, and healing our human nature. He is wrathful, but against the spiritual cancer in us, the corruption and brokenness *in us*. He loves *us* and wants to heal *us* so that we can reflect His image again.

Social Activist: Well, I think Christians waste a lot of time in church, just singing and getting their shout out. Why can't people just get out there and do some good?

Me: Great question. On the one hand, I totally agree that Christians can be more effective. On the other hand, some of the greatest social movements were because of the church and Jesus: the Civil Rights Movement led by the Black church, the Filipino People Power Movement led by Catholics, and so on. I think that our emotional needs and spiritual needs are also important, along with our physical needs, and that Jesus calls us into relationships in which we get to practice being other-centered like he is.

Social Activist: I think we've just got to change laws, schools, structures, and systems. We have to empower poor people. That's going to be more effective anyway.

Me: I'm with you when it comes to changing those things. I'm part of [a group of people giving to microfinance]. And I'm glad you're doing your part, too. But I think what you're doing is assuming that things external to us are the source of the problem. I think you're missing the biggest problem, the internal factor: human nature.

Social Activist: So what's the big deal there?

Me: Well, it's not like poor people are only victims and not perpetrators. Look at alcoholism and domestic violence and stuff. Jesus makes a big difference in the lives of poor families and poor kids. Plus, it's not like making people rich means that they'll do the right thing. Rich people cheat on their spouse just like they'll cheat on the financial system. Like Bernie Madoff or Tiger Woods. And there are plenty of students who *will* take that job with Goldman Sachs because of the money.

Social Activist: I see what you mean. So, do you think that Christians are better than other people?

Me: Well, I would say two things. (1) Christians have a stronger foundation for good and evil because Jesus is good and not evil. I would ask you, 'Do you have a foundation for defining good and evil?' And (2) we have more power to live it out because of Jesus empowers us. I would ask you, 'Are you on your own?'

Social Activist: You mean to say that atheists can't be moral?

Me: I mean to say that whatever a Christian does, he or she can be held up against Jesus, who shows whether it's for or against him, good or sinful. If an atheist does something, what objective standard can you hold that person up to?

Social Activist: Hmmm. So that's why we need a foundation for good and evil?

Me: Yes. But it's not enough to 'know' what is good and what is evil. We need the power to live it out because we run out of love. I know that if I had not given my life to Jesus, I would not be [living in a high-crime, inner city neighborhood]. But because he is in my life, I do it. And there are a lot of other ways in which there is this difference that Jesus makes in my life, to make me less selfish and more loving. I've got a long way to go. But I do think every Christian would say the same thing. So one answer to your question is: Jesus makes a big difference. The first comparison has to be between who we are with him vs. who we would be without him.

Social Activist: So you think that Christians are better than who they would be without Jesus. I guess if you add up that difference across lots of people, it becomes a lot.

Me: Yeah, but also this radically loving God is making us a fit for Himself.

Social Activist: So why do you think God is good? There's a lot of evil in the world.

Me: God is still good, even though there is evil, because He gives all of who He is to deal with the evil in each one of us. Evil is not just out there. It's in here. And God loves us while He wants to surgically remove the evil. The question for each of us is the same: Will I let Him

remove the evil in me? Will you let Him remove the evil in you? Do you want to talk more about that?

Conversation #3

Evolutionist: So you're just saying that we need God to become better people. I think we are just moving on to the next stage of human evolution. We are becoming better people, just because of globalization, and because our survival depends on caring for all humanity. It's not just about raw competition anymore.

Me: So, within your own framework, you believe we can overcome our genetic inheritance of survival of the fittest?

Evolutionist: Definitely

Me: What makes you think we're capable of doing that?

Evolutionist: We're becoming better people. We have human rights. There are fewer deaths from wars. More people are trying to alleviate poverty, and more money is going there. Look at the Gates Foundation, for instance.

Me: Isn't that Western people and Western civilization you're describing there?

Evolutionist: Well, the West has more resources today, and we're realizing that we're all interconnected, and that we can't be colonialists.

Me: So you're saying that the West is at a higher stage in human evolution than the rest of the world? That's an interesting claim. Seems Euro-centric and U.S.-centric and neo-colonialist to me.

Evolutionist: Well, maybe a higher state of consciousness because of our technology.

Me: I could also argue that Western culture is more predatory than other cultures of the world, for example, fueling the rebirth of child sex trafficking and internet porn. But regardless, I'm talking about a change in human nature. Have we brought about a change in human nature?

Evolutionist: Maybe it's possible to think that. Or aim for that.

Me: I don't think the West has changed anyone's human nature. Did you read William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* in high school?

Evolutionist: Yes.

Me: I did, too. The main idea is that human nature contains 'the beast.' So these 'civilized' British schoolboys shipwrecked on an island become what we call 'savages.' And they are rescued from the island by 'civilized' British sailors on warships, whom we no longer call 'savages.' The boys longed for salvation. But who will save the adults? That's the question.

Evolutionist: You're saying we need saving from ourselves?

Me: Yes, exactly. Because our technology is neutral in itself. It only enables us to do more good or bad. It's not going to 'save' us. So unless we talk about human nature, and why we do good and bad, you and I are going to keep being surprised at how destructive people can actually be.

Evolutionist: How do you define good and bad? According to what 'God' tells you?

Me: Actually yes. How do *you* define it?

...(on to the Good and Evil Conversation, below!)

Conversation #4

Muslim: Do you think there's a real difference between the Christian God and the Muslim God?

Me: Isn't it said in Islam that the Muslim God would never become incarnate in human flesh and personally touch human nature?

Muslim: Yes.

Me: Why is that?

Muslim: Because He is too pure, and we are too impure.

Me: And that's one reason why Muslims deny that God could become incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. Maybe he was a prophet, but he could not be God Himself. Right?

Muslim: Yes, that is what is taught.

Me: So then how does the Muslim God ever resolve the problem of human nature?

Muslim: We only have free choices to make. There isn't a problem with human nature.

Me: But the Qur'an Surah 94 says that God had to purify the prophet Mohammed's heart before he could receive the revelation of the Qur'an. Two hadiths also say this (Sahih Muslim, Sahih al-Bukhari).

Muslim: Yes, that is said. Ibn Ishaq states that two men clothed in white had seized him and opened his chest.

Me: What did he need to be cleansed of?

Muslim: Just something in his humanness.

Me: So then, there's something wrong with human nature. It's somehow impure, right?

Muslim: I suppose.

Me: And then why does Mohammed get a free ticket for cleansing, but the rest of us need to work pretty hard to be cleansed, through reading the Qur'an, fasting, and all the other things?

Muslim: Well, he was the prophet. He had to receive the Qur'an, or so it is said.

Me: And if nothing is wrong with human nature, then how do you explain why we're so messed up?

Muslim: It's just our bad choices.

Me: I agree that we make bad choices, but is that all that there is to us? I don't think so. What this is boiling down to is (1) realism and (2) consistency of ideas. (1) Realistically, if we were just neutral, and made our choices neutrally, then why are we all sinners? It's more realistic to say that we are damaged, corrupted from an originally good design. Even Mohammed called himself a sinner, later in life (Qur'an 40:55; 48:2; 47:19; Bukhari's Hadith 8:335, 379, 407, 408; see <http://www.answering-islam.org/Silas/mo-sinner.htm>). That explains a lot more. Would you agree?

Muslim: I follow you. I'll have to think about it.

Me: As for (2) Consistency, Christianity seems more consistent and coherent. The Christian God addresses the human nature problem by grabbing hold of human nature in one person, Jesus, fixing the problem, and then sharing Jesus' healed new humanity with anyone who asks. Why? Because Jesus never sinned, and because God wants to saturate human nature and be in us and with us, drawing us into His very life, His radically loving, other-centered life. That's why our process of growth now is a preparation for us to live a holy, radically loving, other-centered life in eternity. But in the Muslim faith, my impression is that there is incoherence about human nature because Mohammed is treated differently than everyone else. If your God did for Mohammed something that He could do for everyone else but isn't, then by definition He is not doing everything He could to undo human evil. That would make Him at least partly evil. Or at least it would seem that way to me. And then your process of spiritual growth now seems to be

delayed gratification. The Qur'an speaks of heaven as a place where you can have lots of sex and wine, and indulge all the desires you didn't indulge in the present. It gives the impression of delayed gratification. But if that's so, then why? Why does the Muslim God tell us to deny those desires now, only to indulge them later? So it's not just that our Gods are different. The elements of (1) realism and (2) the consistency and coherence of our belief systems are different. All because our sense of human nature is different. Would you like to talk more about that?

Conversation #5

Apathetic Dawdler: I actually like what you're saying here, because I feel like there's not a rush for me to come to Jesus!

Me: What do you mean?

Apathetic Dawdler: I mean that you're not threatening me with hell. Other Christians would try to make me feel scared that I could die on my car ride home, and then I'd be in hell because I didn't accept Jesus right here, right now. So you make it sound like I have a lot of time.

Me: Well, I think there is still a real urgency to looking into Jesus now. Do you think you can live a self-centered life, and then when you're old and on your deathbed, you can accept Jesus?

Apathetic Dawdler: Exactly!

Me: But what makes you think you will become the type of person who will want to give your life to Jesus later, if all you want now is more time to yourself?

Apathetic Dawdler: What? Why? Won't it be easy?

Me: No. Because self-centeredness is addicting. The brokenness in your human nature will become addicted to self-centeredness, self-flattery, self-justifying, self-indulgence, self-importance, and so on. So if that is how you are training your human nature to respond to Jesus, when you meet him, you will probably look at all eternity stretched out in front of you and say, 'Jesus, what's the rush? You've got lots of time in this eternity. How about 10,000 more years of freedom for me, and then I'll accept you?'

Apathetic Dawdler: Say, that's right! I'm going to use that with him. See, there is no rush. [smiles]

Me: There *is* a rush, actually. Not a rush because your life might be cut short by a car crash, but a rush because you are shaping your own human nature and your own desires to become more and more sinful.

Apathetic Dawdler: Why is that?

Me: Imagine that you're an alcoholic. And that one day you stand before Jesus and say, 'I'd like alcohol.' Jesus will say, 'I don't have alcohol here for you. But because I love you, I am offering you a human nature that is healed of alcoholism and responsive instead to God the Father. Do you want to receive it?' If you're addicted to alcohol, what will you answer?

Apathetic Dawdler: That's a good question. If I'm an addict, I would probably say, 'I don't want what *you* have. Give me what *I* want.'

Me: Absolutely. So what's your addiction?

Apathetic Dawdler: What?

Me: I think you are already pretty addicted to your own self-centeredness. And Jesus will say, 'I'm not here to let you be self-centered. Because I love you, I am offering you a human nature that is healed of self-centeredness and responsive to God the Father. Do you want to receive it?'

Apathetic Dawdler: Wait a minute. You're saying Jesus only gives us a healed human nature? I thought he gives us a reward for just believing in him.

Me: As if heaven is a place you can eat ice cream and not get fat? Or a place where you'll get whatever you want right now?

Apathetic Dawdler: Right!

Me: That's not it at all. That would make Jesus just a middleman to something else people really want, which is not him, but ice cream instead. The problem is that we don't desire the right things. So heaven cannot be what we currently want, raised to the nth degree. Neither is hell what we currently hate, raised to the nth degree. Heaven and hell are not defined by *us*. They are defined by *Jesus*. Jesus is giving us good desires from his own self. He shares his human nature, and his desires. Heaven is the state of receiving him for those of us who want him. Hell is the state of being around him when you don't want to be, of him denying what you want, and then chasing you when you want him to stop.

Apathetic Dawdler: What if *we* don't want what *he* wants?

Me: Well, then for all eternity, he will never give up on calling you out, calling you to give up your addictions and your very self, and calling you to him. He'll be a stalker to you, saying, 'Hey, I love you. You were made for me. Give up whatever else you want. I am here for you.'

Apathetic Dawdler: Yeah, that does sound stalker-ish.

Me: That, my friend, is hell. It's being chased around forever by this Jesus who loves you, and can change you, but you don't want him because you're addicted to something else. Then, every step he takes towards you will just push you further and further away. Except that you can't hide. You can't escape from him.

Apathetic Dawdler: Dude, that sounds terrible.

Me: Well, it would be if you believe that you are fine, and that you've basically got everything you need.

Apathetic Dawdler: This is complicated. So you're saying that I actually can't trust myself completely.

Me: That's right. You can't trust yourself completely because you're not okay. The longer you let your desires go on your own, the harder it might be for you to give your life to Jesus. And one day, it might be too late. We are all not just human beings, but human *becomings*.

Apathetic Dawdler: So you think I'm headed for hell, too?

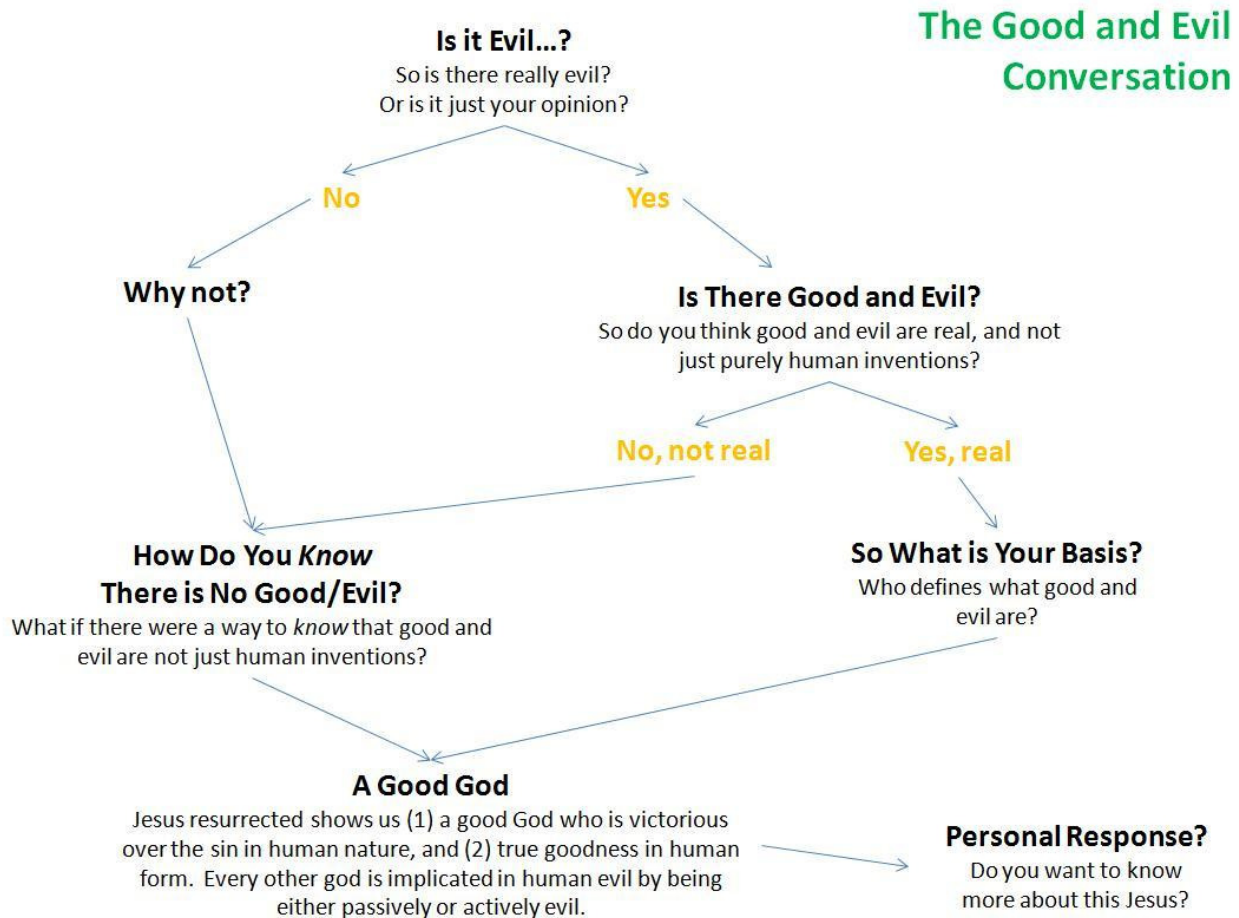
Me: I think you are *becoming* someone who would experience the love of Jesus as hell, because you're so apathetic, and Jesus wants you to be as loving as he is.

Apathetic Dawdler: [silence]

Me: Don't you look back on your life and see how apathy, lack of love, has hurt other people in your life? Hurt you? The question is whether you want to be in touch with the God of love. Maybe you'd like to read a short and surprisingly fun book by C.S. Lewis about why people in hell want to stay there (it's called *The Great Divorce*), and talk about it with me?

Deeper Conversations: The Good and Evil Question

At times, either I ask, or the non-Christian asks, whether good and evil is real or just in our heads. There is a helpful quote from J.K. Rowling that I like to start off with. In the first Harry Potter book, Professor Quirrell, speaking about what Lord Voldemort taught him, says, ‘There is no good and evil, only power, and those too weak to seek it.’²⁴



Exercise: Role Play. One person role play a non-Christian. The other person, role play a Christian (or just be yourself). Have an intelligent conversation. Try to follow, generally, the flow of conversation here.

²⁴ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (New York, NY: Scholastic, 1999), p.291

Here are examples of conversations that I've had.

Conversation #1

Been Hurt: What kind of God would allow all the evil in the world? What's your explanation for that?

Me: You mean you think that evil in the world is an argument against the existence of God, right?

Been Hurt: Yeah.

Me: Has someone done something to you that you think was evil?

Been Hurt: Well, yes. It's a personal thing, but yes.

Me: Well, if there was no God at all, then we'd just be chemicals wrapped in skin, competing for survival with other chemicals wrapped in skin. There wouldn't be any such thing as good or evil.

Been Hurt: Well, isn't that easier to believe?

Me: Except that you believe someone did *evil* to you. Something in you tells you that there is evil, which means there is good. And if there is good, there is Someone higher than us who defines it as good. So your belief in evil is an argument that God exists.

Been Hurt: That's ridiculous. You're just playing games.

Me: No, I'm not. Have you read the first Harry Potter book? Where Professor Quirrell, speaking about what Lord Voldemort taught him, says, 'There is no good and evil, only power, and those too weak to seek it.'²⁵

Been Hurt: Sure.

Me: Well, do you agree with that, or not? 'There is no good and evil, only power, and those too weak to seek it'? Whatever was done to you wasn't really *evil*. It was just someone using power. And you were too weak to resist it?

Been Hurt: Well...

Me: Look, I can tell that something in you doesn't believe that. I don't believe it either. I believe there is good and evil. I believe Jesus is offering to heal our human nature, the source of our evil. Whatever was done to you, he wants to heal that but also destroy whatever it was in the other person. Because he destroyed something in himself, like Harry Potter did to Voldemort's soul, so he can share his new humanity with each of us. That's the only way evil can really be tackled. It can't just be forgiven or passed over. It has to be destroyed, and people need to be healed. Have you ever heard of that explanation of Jesus before?

Conversation #2

Cultural Relativist: Do we really need an objective standard for good and evil? Why can't we just define it for ourselves?

Me: Has that ever worked?

Cultural Relativist: What do you mean? What's so hard about it?

Me: Let's take one issue as an example. Have you heard of Amy Chua's book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*?

Cultural Relativist: Sure.

²⁵ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (New York, NY: Scholastic, 1999), p.291

Me: One of the good discussions that book encouraged was this: Can white parents tell Asian parents that they are too controlling, and to be less demanding? Can Asian parents tell white parents that they are too lazy as parents, and to be more directive?

Cultural Relativist: On one level, sure: Everyone is entitled to their opinion. So people should be able to say that. But I see what you mean. I've seen both extremes in my friends' families. Is there a real right and wrong? Good and evil? How do we know where to draw the line?

Me: And why do we draw the line there in your camp? Why not in my camp? Or closer to my camp?

Cultural Relativist: And to make things more complicated, we're taught to respect other peoples' cultures, and that we shouldn't judge other peoples' cultures.

Me: And if it's all relative, then anyone can hide behind 'culture.' Men can treat women horribly and say, 'It's my culture.'

Cultural Relativist: How would we know that the Christian definition of good and evil is the right one, then? Isn't that just one opinion against other opinions?

Me: What if God had a way of revealing Himself to us personally? Like in the Jesus of history. And especially in his resurrection?

Cultural Relativist: Don't we have to use science here? A resurrection is impossible.

Me: We can use science, but not in the sense of lab science. Have you ever served in jury duty?

Cultural Relativist: No, why?

Me: Because when someone is on trial, you can't repeat the crime in a lab. It's unrepeatable, so you can't use lab science. Instead, you have an unrepeatable event. So you have to use evidence, witnesses, forensic science, and other tools like logic, what we understand about human motivation, and so on.

Cultural Relativist: So what does that wind up telling us?

Me: Well, when Dr. Simon Greenleaf, one of the founders of Harvard Law School, and an expert in the use of evidence in court, looked at the New Testament, he first set out to disprove it. But he found that the more he examined the evidence, the more it held up. So he became a Christian.

Cultural Relativist: No way. One of the founders of Harvard Law School became a Christian because he looked at the evidence?

Me: Yup. Do you want to look at the evidence for Jesus?

Conversation #3

Strong Critic: Look, I don't see how Christians can claim to know what good and evil are. You guys came down on the wrong side of slavery, women, and now homosexuality. Your definition of good and evil is totally crazy.

Me: You raise a good point, that Christians have made mistakes in the past. I could explain what was going on if you want. But yes, I do think that the Christian definition of good and evil is the only one that makes sense. I'd like to compare it with yours.

Strong Critic: You have a quick explanation for all that? I find that hard to believe.

Me: Sure. The earliest Christians freed slaves. The first kingdoms to abolish slavery did so because of Christian influence: France, Hungary, England, Iceland, the Netherlands, and the

Scandinavian countries.²⁶ Western Europe got back into the slavery game because they took over Muslim slave ports in West Africa. Christians then re-abolished slavery (like Wilberforce in Britain), and it took longer in the U.S. because American Christians were simple-minded.

Strong Critic: I've not heard that history before. But what about all those Bible references about slavery? It's right there in the Ten Commandments: 'Do not covet your neighbor's slave...'?

Me: The kind of slavery that was practiced in the Old Testament was self-indentured servitude to either make money through a contract of labor or pay off debts for a very limited time. That is obvious when you look at two verses. In Exodus 21:16, people could not be kidnapped into slavery or forced into it. And in Deuteronomy 23:15 – 16, slaves can run away at any time and the Israelites were commanded by God to help the runaway run away and settle anywhere he likes. If 'slaves' can run away at any time, then that means this type of 'slavery' was voluntary. So I understand why Americans would have strong feelings about slavery, but you've really been misinformed about what the Bible says about it.²⁷ Slavery in the Bible didn't mean the same thing as slavery in the U.S. Just because you know a *word* doesn't mean you know the *meaning*. Do you know what the phrase, 'I'm mad about my flat' means?

Strong Critic: Doesn't it mean you're upset about a flat tire?

Me: If I'm an American, yes. But if I'm a Brit, in London, it could mean that I'm happy about my apartment.

Strong Critic: I get it. The word slavery here doesn't mean the same thing as the word slavery there. Look, I just think that what is 'good' has to start from the individual, not from some God or some book.

Me: So the more freedom you have, the better?

Strong Critic: Yes.

Me: So when my dad was an alcoholic, was he doing what was 'good' for him?

Strong Critic: No, he was destroying himself.

Me: You're right, and not just himself. So you're actually saying that you have to be good before you can be properly free. Goodness is different from freedom and more important than freedom and comes before freedom. So the question is still where does your definition of good and evil come from?

Strong Critic: Can't we just say that it's just obvious?

Me: No, it's not obvious. My mom really does not like the fact that I live in a lower income, black neighborhood. She's basically an atheist, so she thinks that by living in not the best school district, that I'm doing something *morally wrong* to my children. But my wife and I do this because we believe in Jesus, and are trying to live out his care for the vulnerable, and teaching our kids something *morally valuable*. My point is that you actually can't start with your own definition of good and evil, and evaluate someone else by it, because that's just intellectually lazy. You want to lob arrows at the Christian sense of good and evil from within your own castle of good and evil, but you actually don't know what good and evil are. You have no foundation for it.

Strong Critic: I see what you mean.

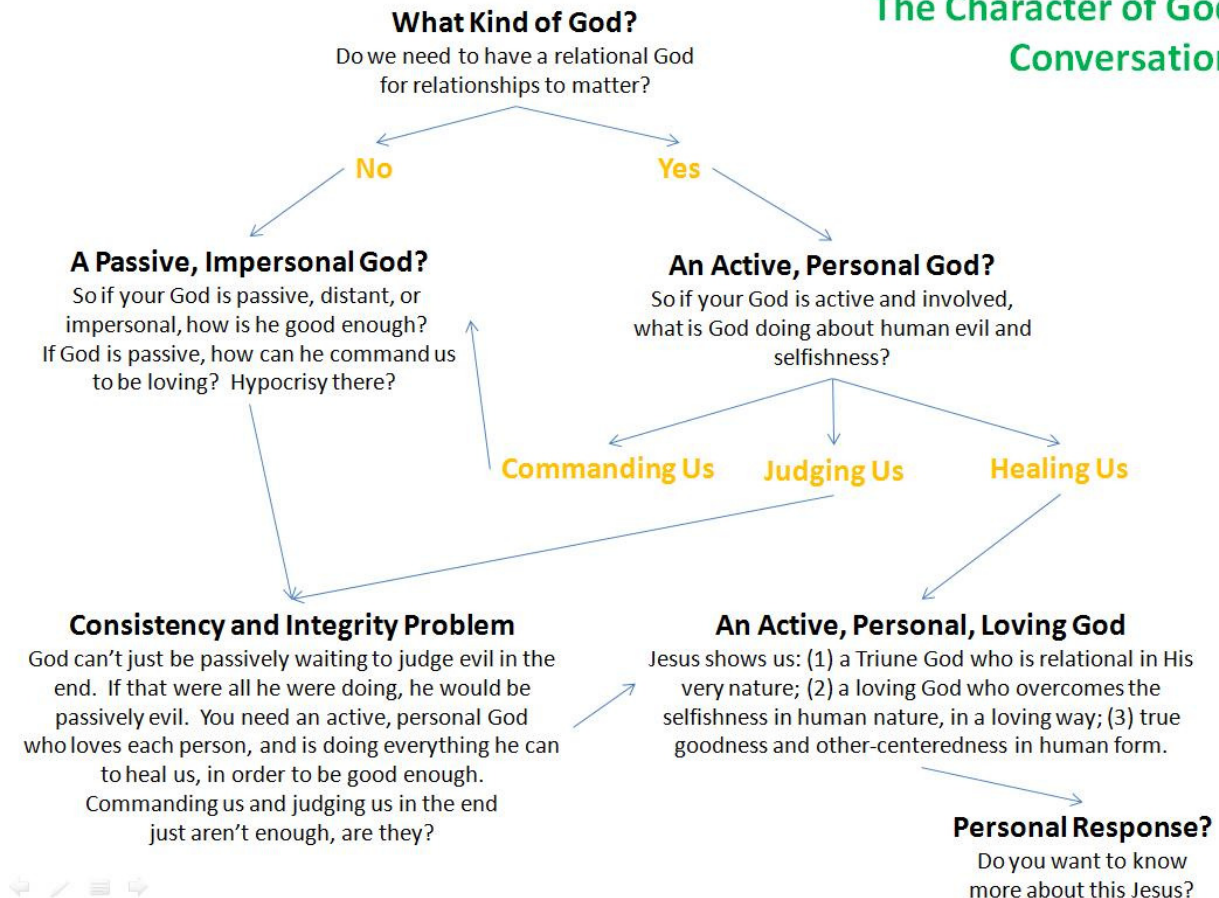
Me: So if you're going to say no to Christian faith, you have to explore why it might be true, regardless of what your prior commitments to a 'good' and an 'evil' are. You have to look at the historical evidence for Jesus, and his resurrection to give us a new humanity.

²⁶ For a more extensive summary of how Christians dealt with slavery in the first millennium and a half, primarily in Europe, see my paper, *Slavery in Christianity: First to Fifteenth Centuries*, see <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/race-slavery-belief-systems>

²⁷ For more information and a treatment of every Scripture related to biblical slavery, see my paper, *Slavery in the Bible and Slavery Today*, <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/race-slavery-belief-systems>

Deeper Conversations: The Character of God Question

The Character of God Conversation



Read the examples of conversations that I've had. Then do the exercise below.

Conversation #1

Daniel the Deist: I just believe in a god. He made everything. That seems reasonable. It's hard to imagine all this coming from nothing.

Me: So what is this 'God' doing now?

Daniel the Deist: Well, nothing. I think He's just sitting back and watching.

Me: And why do you believe in this 'God'?

Daniel the Deist: Seems consistent with the Big Bang.

Me: Does this 'God' care about us? Like want a personal relationship with us?

Daniel the Deist: I don't think so.

Me: Is this 'God' doing anything?

Daniel the Deist: No. But I think he does serve to give us human dignity, so that we're not just random cells.

Me: But if this 'God' doing anything to undo human evil? Or is he just passive?

Daniel the Deist: Just passive. This is a god who doesn't intervene. So he doesn't get my hopes up. I used to go to a Catholic church, you know. And we'd talk about miracles. I prayed for one. When it didn't happen, over and over, I got tired of praying. What's the use? It seemed like God was passive, and didn't do anything. I think I'm in good company. A lot of the American founding fathers were deists. 'Endowed by our creator with certain inalienable rights,' and stuff.

Me: But the Christian God isn't passive, and especially not about human evil.

Daniel the Deist: You've got to be kidding me. What is he doing?

Me: At least two things. He speaks to us through our conscience, and that's why we have some notion of goodness, love, justice, beauty, order, and so on. But he also is actively undoing the corruption in human nature. He acquired a human body, acquired the same disease that we all have – sin, fought against the disease throughout his human life, and then died and rose again so he could kill the corruption in himself and raise his humanity new and fresh. With that understanding, he is really active. And I do believe in miracles, so I think occasionally miracles do happen. But the main thing is His healing of human nature.

Daniel the Deist: So what difference does that make?

Me: The difference is that the Christian God is 100% good, and giving 100% of himself to undo the damage to human nature that we have inflicted on ourselves. Your deist 'God' is passive, is doing nothing about human evil in any way. But to do nothing in the face of human evil is to be... evil! Would you agree?

Daniel the Deist: I suppose so.

Me: Therefore, the passive deist 'God' that you speak of actually cannot anchor human dignity and value, because he does nothing to uphold it. Only the Christian God, who is 100% good, 100% loving, and actively doing stuff, who will do more stuff, can anchor human dignity and value.

Daniel the Deist: So our concept of 'God' matters, is what you're saying?

Conversation #2

Wandering Catholic: I believe that there is a 'God,' but I think Jesus was just a man. I think the church just kind of deified Jesus over time, and raised him up higher and higher until they thought of him as God. So I can still sit through my church services and stuff, and appreciate it, because Jesus was a great teacher. Whether or not I think of him as God really doesn't affect anything. Does it?

Me: Well, I think it actually does. If Jesus is not God in the flesh, then how is God fixing the evil in human nature?

Wandering Catholic: Huh? I don't follow you.

Me: The earliest understanding of Jesus being God was that God wanted to solve the problem of evil in human nature. We had corrupted ourselves. So God took a human body, and along with that body inherited the human disease of sin. He fought against the sin and never committed a sin. But he did have a fallen human nature. So in his death and resurrection, he killed the sin and raised his humanity new, cleansed, and God-soaked. The church didn't actually deify Jesus over time. They started out that way. In John's Gospel, one of the first disciples, Thomas, says to Jesus, 'My Lord and my God.'

Wandering Catholic: I've never heard it that way before.

Me: Well, just for a moment, imagine if you separate Jesus from God. What are you left with?

Wandering Catholic: You're left with a God that can still serve as the Creator, and Jesus can serve as a teacher.

Me: But then they both become hypocrites.

Wandering Catholic: What? Why?

Me: God becomes a hypocrite, because He claims to be good but doesn't do anything about human evil. And to do nothing about human evil is to be evil. Wouldn't you agree?

Wandering Catholic: I'll think about that.

Me: And Jesus becomes a hypocrite, too, because he taught that we could become joined to God, and share in God's goodness and life and love. He wouldn't give us forgiveness from God, because he couldn't really speak for God. He wouldn't be the fulfillment of the Old Testament, because the Old Testament hoped for God to heal the problem of human nature and reunite people to God. I guess Jesus would still seem like a cool guy on some level, but he would really fail in some key ways.

Role Play. One person role play a non-Christian with some other concept of God. The other person, role play a Christian (or just be yourself). Have an intelligent conversation. Try to follow, generally, the flow of conversation in the diagram.

Chapter 5: The Personal Development Pyramid, and How to Teach It

CONTENTS

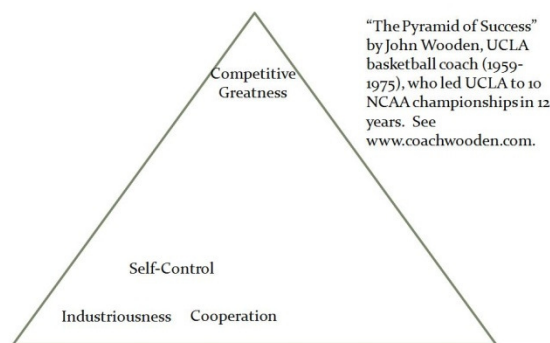
1. What is this framework we're using?
2. Why this framework?
3. How long does mentoring last?
4. What are my responsibilities as a mentee?

PART ONE: WHAT IS THIS FRAMEWORK WE'RE USING?

Introduction & Analogy: John Wooden's Pyramid of Success

What does it mean to grow spiritually? We need a simple and biblically faithful framework for understanding that. Let me first make an analogy. When I was in junior high, I wanted to be a good basketball player. So I went to basketball camp one summer, directed by the winningest coach in NCAA basketball history, John Wooden. John Wooden led UCLA to 10 NCAA championships in 12 years. He was a great coach. And the way he helped his players the most was by giving them his framework for being a great ball player, and then working at it. Here is his framework: what he called The Pyramid of Success. He drew a pyramid. At the top was the most difficult part of the game: Competitive greatness. And underneath that were the building blocks that supported that. At the very bottom were core character qualities that you needed.

The Development of Basketball Players

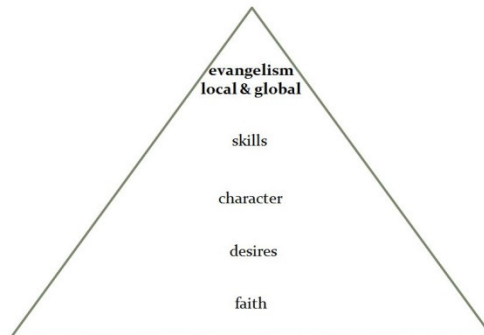


These were not skills at the bottom, but character qualities. In other words, if you did not work at cooperation, your teamwork would suffer, and you would not be great at this game. You would have a whole side of you undeveloped. So I went to this camp in junior high and won this award; it was awesome.

The Framework: Discipleship for the Purpose of Mission

But recently, I've asked, 'What if we took this tool and diagrammed what it takes to develop as a Christian?' Here it is: A triangle or pyramid, and what goes at the top? What is the most difficult part of being a Christian, of following Jesus? Living out Jesus' evangelistic mission, locally and globally. What does that mean? I'll explain that in a minute. And I'll explain *why* I think that. But first let me explain the other parts of the pyramid.

The Development of Christians



At the base is *Faith*: Your personal relationship with Jesus, your knowledge of him, your experience of him, your understanding of how he reveals who God is, and the character of God to us. That would include the following questions:

- How authentic and confident do I feel when I think about sharing Jesus with others who don't know him?
- What is my understanding of Jesus? Why is Jesus unique?
 - How does Jesus reveal who God is? He reveals *all* of God's character, not just the 'loving and forgiving' side of God, as if the Father is the offended, angry lawgiver and Jesus is the suffering victim. Rather, Jesus reveals the Father perfectly as the God who is healing and transforming humanity by crushing human evil within us. See Hebrews 1:4, Colossians 1:19 and 2:9, John 14:8 – 11.
 - How does Jesus reveal what it means to be fully human? See the Gospels. Everything Jesus did was through his human dependence on the Father.
- What have I experienced of him through his Spirit?
 - For hearing the inner voice of the Spirit, see Rom.8:16, Psalm 32, Psalm 91
 - For empowerment by the Spirit, see Rom.8:1 – 17, Eph.1:15 – 2:10
 - For character of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit, see Gal.5:22 – 23
 - For the gifts of the Spirit, see 1 Cor.12 – 14
- How do I relate to him? i.e. How is my prayer life? What are my regular patterns of spending "date time with God"? Journaling, taking walks, times of silence and solitude?
- How do I handle loneliness? Is my faith too dependent on other people?
 - God often draws people close to himself during 'wilderness times.' Notice the pattern with Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Daniel, Jesus, Paul, John. See especially Jesus' time alone in the wilderness, Mt.3:13 – 4:11, and the SG notes at www.anastasiscenter.org/bible-messiah-matthew
- How do I engage with God when I read Scripture?

- Am I entering this story? Or am I just using God to supplement my personal story and desire for success, etc.?
- What parts of Scripture are most important to know? Generally, I think that the Gospels, Acts, Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians are most important because they were written with the broadest purposes.
- Am I allowing Jesus to train me in his mission as I read the Gospels and Acts?
- What parts of my life are easy to entrust to Jesus? What parts are difficult?

Above that is *Desires*. When God starts healing us and drawing us to Himself, He reawakens desires that come from us being made in the image of God. Throughout the Hebrew wisdom literature, the ancient Israelites recognized that God's commands were appropriate to God's creation of us as His image bearers. Sin was a problem, yes. But fundamentally, there was a nice 'fit' or 'match' between God's wise commands and us. Sin made us resist God at times, but God's commands themselves were good for us. Hence, they said they *desired* God's laws (Ps.119) and said to one another, 'Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the *desires* of your heart' (Ps.37:4). For us nowadays, I think we desire goodness, love, truth, justice, significance, meaning, beauty, and order. As people allow the Spirit of Christ to shine Christ's image in us, the more we will desire those things again, in convergence with our original design as God's image bearers. Usually, our desires will be ahead of our character, although our desires may be mixed. In other words, we will want more of Christ in our lives before we actually make a firm commitment to him. But ultimately, I believe that healthy spiritual desires really propel us towards transformation in Christ and into Christ's mission. So I have collected and developed some resources for this: www.anastasiscenter.org/desire. Developing desires would include the following questions:

- What do you really want in life?
- Are you able to distinguish between the desires in you that come from God, and the desires in you that come from sin?
- How can you make choices that strengthen the godly desires in you?
 - See the message *How Our Choices Shape Our Desires: Experiencing the Triune God*
- What are you passionate about? What difference do you want to make? Maybe that is worth exploring as a career?
 - See the message *Career Discernment: A Christian Perspective Based on Passions and Desires*
- Do you carve out time to journal, pray, and do things to help you cultivate your desire for God? You might want to develop a 'spiritual fitness plan' or 'rhythm of life'.
 - See the message *Developing a Rhythm of Life to Cultivate Godly Desires: A Spiritual Fitness Plan*

Above that is *Character*: This involves your ability to let Jesus love people through you, to have healthy relationships, to forgive, to put yourself second consistently. Developing character would include the following questions:

- Who do I find it easy to enjoy? Who do I find it difficult to relate to? What does this tell me about myself?
- When I read key sections of Scripture, for example Jesus' teaching on the heart in Matthew 5 – 7, what do I sense I most need to focus on? Is it: humility and willingness

to change (Mt.5:1 – 12), evangelism (5:13 – 16), anger and reconciliation and ability to be in community (5:21 – 26), lust and sexuality (5:27 – 32), integrity and truthfulness (5:33 – 37), loving others who are difficult (5:38 – 48), prayer and inner integrity before God (6:1 – 18), forgiveness (6:14 – 15), materialism (6:19 – 34), worry (6:25 – 34), judgmentalism (7:1 – 6)?

- What do others say I most need to focus on?
- Your ability to be in healthy Christian community is a part of your character. Where do Christian friendship, accountability, and community fit into your life?
 - See passages about community, forgiveness and reconciliation (Mt.5:13 – 16, 21 – 26)
- Do I make space for non-Christians in my life? Am I trying to integrate my non-Christian friends into my Christian friends and my life?
 - Notice how Levi/Matthew came to Jesus and then threw a party for his tax-collector friends to meet Jesus (Mt.9:1 – 13). He immediately tried to live an integrated life.
- Do I care about the social justice issues related to this person or people group? Especially if they are a historically or currently oppressed group.
 - See Luke 4:14 – 30, where Jesus says that he has come to preach to the poor. See also Luke 14:12 – 14 about inviting the poor to your table, and 18:15 – 19:10 here Jesus called the rich man to give to the poor, and Zaccheus paid restitution for those he had wronged.
- Am I dating someone (or wanting to) with the purpose of discerning for marriage? What am I struggling with in dating? Asking questions about? Learning about myself?
 - For Scripture on marriage and sexuality, see 1 Corinthians 7 and Song of Songs. See also www.anastasiscenter.org/bible-writings-megillotsong

Above that is *Skills*: Your ability to articulate what you’ve experienced or what you believe. Your ability to compare Christian views with other views, like atheist views, or Buddhist views, etc. Developing skills could involve any of the following:

- How do I bring up spiritual questions?
- How do I help others ask spiritual questions?
- How do I interpret reality as fundamentally spiritual?
- How does the Christian faith compare with other belief systems?
- Explaining how Christian faith has led to lots of social justice movements
- Explaining the concept of hell and how it relates to the character of God
- Having a thoughtful explanation for why homosexuality is not God’s ideal
- Explaining how science and faith can co-exist
- Explaining how Christianity is not a “White man’s religion”
- Explaining how Christian missionary work is not simply “imperialism”
- Understanding another person’s or group’s cultural background (or even language) so I can meaningfully share the Jesus story
- Understanding the places of resonance and dissonance they will have with the biblical story

Again, these are only sample questions, many of which come up on college campuses. Really the list of possible skills goes on and on.

TO DO: Identify one issue in each category: faith, desire, character, skills. If you feel okay discussing those issues, do so with a mentor. Tackle at least one issue each week, in no particular order.

NOTE: The pyramid is not a chronological roadmap. You can develop faith, desire, character, and skills simultaneously. You don't need to 'perfect' one stage and then move onto the next. They are too interrelated.

PART TWO: WHY THIS FRAMEWORK?

The Personal Reason

Now why do I think this framework is helpful? First let me give you a personal reason, and then the biblical reason, and then the pastoral reason. I came to Jesus late in high school, because I was asking a lot of questions about life and meaning and relationships, and three friends of mine introduced me to Jesus. During my junior year of high school, when I said yes to Jesus, I immediately had to think about my parents. How would I explain this to them? They were not Christians. They were not the religious type at all, really. I had to wrestle with the question, 'Is my experience genuine? Do I really know this Jesus?' Those were *faith* level questions. I also had to answer character level questions: 'Was I being changed so that even my parents could see it? Was I allowing Jesus to impact my life so that my walk matched my talk?' Then there were skill level questions: My dad asked me, 'What about science?' since he had studied physics and cosmology. I had to ask myself, 'Can I give an intelligent response to my dad, especially?' So you can see that early in my life, the driver of my spiritual growth was others, and the need to care for others relationally and spiritually. Jesus' mission to the world, locally and globally, was at the top of the pyramid, and so everything else needed to be strengthened.

Now, almost 20 years later, I find the same thing is still true. My wife and I have lived for 8 years in the second highest crime area in Boston, a lower-income area of Dorchester, down the red line. We do community organizing there and a few other things. In my neighborhood are some Haitian families who have escaped really difficult circumstances in Haiti. One of my friends on my street is a young Haitian man whose family has some vodou background. One day while we were talking about spiritual things, he turned to me and said, 'I don't tell a lot of people this, but I can see dead people.' With wide eyes, I said, 'You mean like Bruce Willis in *The Sixth Sense*?' Because I'm wanting him and others in my neighborhood to catch a glimpse of Jesus and fall in love with Jesus, that motivates me in faith, character, and skills. I need to wrestle with the supernatural and ask, 'Do I believe that Jesus is greater than anything else out there?' I have to ask the Lord to work in my character, because I need courage and patience and compassion. I also need to care about social injustices, racism, and institutional forms of oppression. I have to care about the public schools, and not just because *my kids* are in them, but for *all kids*. Then I have to develop skills. I've felt like the Lord pointed me to learn Haitian Creole, because speaking a language is a part of loving someone, and it's a skill. All of these

things build up to the top block, the hardest thing: caring about the world as God does, locally and globally.

The Biblical Reason

Here is the biblical reason I believe this pyramid is a good tool: Everything Jesus did before this with his disciples was preparing them for his and their mission to the world, to invite the world to be healed and transformed by Jesus, something Christians call the Great Commission. That's why every Gospel ends with a Commissioning passage.

- 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' (Matthew 28:19 – 20)
- 'But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' (Mark 16:7)
- 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.' (Luke 24:46 – 47)
- 'As the Father has sent me, I also send you.' (John 20:21)

Furthermore, most of Paul's letters end with Paul asking for prayer that he might share the great news about Jesus. This shows that Paul was not just a brilliant theologian, but first and foremost an active, courageous missionary. Here are some examples:

- 'And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; but as it is written, 'They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.' (Rom.15:20 – 21) 'Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which...has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.' (Rom.16:25 – 27)
- 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.' (1 Cor.15:58) 'I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.' (1 Cor.16:8 – 9)
- 'Pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.' (Eph.6:19 – 20)
- '[Pray] at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.' (Col.4:3 – 6)

Jesus wants us to share in his excitement and joy of others coming to him (Lk.15). My son John was born in September of 2000. And my wife Ming and I were totally excited. He was our first child. And for two years, we loved hanging out with him, reading to him, crawling around with him, and getting to know this little guy as he got to know us and our family and friends and the

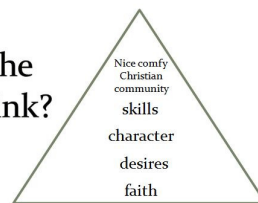
world around him. Then two years after John was born, our daughter Zoe was born. And I was a little worried. I had heard about the terrible two's, and I wondered, 'Will John be terrible? Will he get jealous of his little sister? Will he reverse potty train and pee in his underwear because of the baby?' I prayed, 'Lord, help him to love his sister!!' And, he totally did. I came to get him from home the morning after Zoe was born, and he called out her name: 'Zoe?' It was the first time he said a two syllable word. As we were walking to the hospital in the brisk October air, he stopped to pick up an acorn that had fallen from a tree, and said, 'For Zoe?' We saved that acorn and hung it on a string. And to this day, it is our family's most precious Christmas tree ornament we have. Because it symbolizes the fact that John shared in our love for Zoe. He was developing as a person. Similarly, Jesus wants to welcome other people into God's family, and to shape everyone's character to what is appropriate for the family of a loving Father. That is another way of saying that Jesus' mission is to love, transform, and heal humanity by bringing them (1) to himself and (2) *into his love for the world*.

The Pastoral and Practical Reason

Let's say you meet another Christian and you get the sense that 'just having a nice comfy Christian community' or 'having a nice little group of Christian friends' is on top of their pyramid? Let's see what happens? Well, how much *faith* is needed for that? Well, some. After all, you need to be a Christian to have Christian community. How much *character*? Some; you need to be okay at friendship, at reconciliation, at integrity. How many *skills* are needed for that? Not very many. You just need to speak the same language and have decent social skills. Notice how the pyramid would shrink? Their personal development would be stunted, and that Christian would become cliquy, exclusive, and unwelcoming. Do we want to be like that? No!

Case Study: What if the top changed?
 What skills, character, and faith are
 needed to have **nice comfy, Christian
 community?**

NOT MUCH
 Notice how much the
 triangle would shrink?



When anything else is on top, Christians become hypocritical. Though we're never perfect, we'd become even more resistant to seeing our own cliquishness, lack of friendliness, lack of social concern, lack of hospitality, etc. We'd be like FEMA during Hurricane Katrina. We're *supposed* to serve others, but we'd wind up serving ourselves.

Even non-Christians can appreciate this. It's actually in their best interest if Christians are missional. Why? Because when something else is on top, and something always is, Christians

make bad mistakes. For example, if ‘patriotism and nationalism’ are on top, then Christians start to become American nationalists who don’t care about the rest of the world.

When Christians have rightly understood Jesus’ mission and our true mission, we’ve respected cultures and reconciled hostile cultures like with the Jesuits. We’ve cared about the poor like the two Christian men who founded Pura Vida coffee in order to employ the poor and reinvest the profits into education, health, and youth development in South America. We’ve even died for others, like when Martin Luther King and other Civil Rights marchers were marching against injustice. However, whenever we’ve had self-preservation in some form up there, then we’ve made mistakes, we’ve been cowards, we’ve not cared as Jesus does. So it’s for our own sake, for Jesus’ sake, and for other’s sake that this pyramid should have Jesus’ mission on top.

One day when you graduate (hopefully!) and get a job, you’ll hear the mission statements of different companies. Let’s say you graduate and go to work for Amazon.com. Their mission is, ‘To be the most customer-centric company in the world, where people can find and discover anything they want to buy online.’ Is that big enough for you? Goldman Sachs says, ‘Our goal is to provide superior returns to our shareholders.’ How’s that for you? Corporate mission statements are so much the rage nowadays. You can google ‘corporate mission statements’ and find tons of books and software to ‘help you write a really motivating mission statement.’ Corporations need a nice-sounding mission statement because of the general lack of meaning in people’s lives. I have seen in many of you a desire to give your life to something larger. You know you were made for a larger mission. But what is it going to be? And is it going to be big enough for your heart?

PART THREE: HOW LONG DOES MENTORING LAST?

Good mentoring relationships can last for a long time, certainly much longer than a few weeks. It depends on what program you are participating in. Let me give two different examples. In Boston College’s Asian Christian Fellowship, for example, we sign up to be mentors for 1 year. Being a mentor involves meeting with your mentee every week or every other week, to connect and deepen your friendship, but also to study Matthew 3 – 7, to bring the mentee out to do evangelism via our proxe stations, and to help the mentee reach out to their non-Christian friends. The goal of mentoring is to develop partners for the mission.

In other circumstances, without a formal mentoring program, I have offered to mentor people for 3 or 4 weeks, and suggested that limited framework for older Christian students serving as mentors. The reason why I used that as a starting point is because:

1. You as the mentor need a way out of the formal meeting relationship. You might decide that this person needs to make some important decisions before they’ll actually be a missional Christian. Perhaps you thought the person would be more missional than they actually are. Or, you might decide that the person has areas of hurt and brokenness that require a professional Christian counselor, and presumably you’re not one. Or, you might simply need to disciple someone else.

2. Your mentee needs a way out of the formal meeting relationship. Your mentee might have agreed to meet with you out of obligation, and might not really be missional or ready to become missional. Or, your mentee needs time to process more on her/his own. Or, your mentee might be ready to do specific outreach to non-Christian friends, or might be ready to disciple some other younger Christians. In this case, you could coach them as they become an evangelist/discipler/mentor, and that's exciting to see!

Again, you can always feel free to extend the number of meetings you have. But every mentoring relationship should have a goal, and it should be clear when it is over. This 3 – 4 week framework gives both mentor and mentee a chance to reflect and discern whether to continue with each other in this formal way, or to turn their attention to other people. It also gives the mentee the opportunity to 'own' their personal spiritual growth. If it's always spoon-fed them, there is the possibility that they will simply become dependent on you as the mentor.

The ultimate goal of discipling/mentoring others is to help make the mentee more independently dependent on the Lord. Sometimes a mentee will make their spiritual growth too dependent on a mentor. The mentor then becomes the victim of her/his own success. And the mentee's personal growth is undermined.

PART FOUR: WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES AS A MENTEE?

Fundamentally, your mentor hopes you will take ownership of your own spiritual growth in the context of Jesus' mission. The specifics might vary. Your mentor might ask them to lead you in a Bible study. S/he will probably ask you which non-Christian friends you're praying for, who you're trying to reach out to.

Chapter 6: Other Resources to Help With Matthew 3 – 7

‘I want to reach out to my friends and tell them about Jesus. But I don’t want to stop sleeping with my boyfriend.’

When you’re trying to have spiritual integrity with Jesus, and especially when you’re trying to lead a ministry, hearing that is not pleasant. It’s easy for immature or new Christians to separate discipleship and evangelism, or separate character from outreach. But eventually, it catches up to you in one form or another.

‘The reason I stopped coming to the fellowship last year was because [X], my Christian friend, didn’t handle a conflict very well at all. I was so turned off that it took me a long time to figure out if I wanted to keep pursuing this spiritual stuff.’

Sometimes, despite our best intentions, sad things like this happen. We all have character flaws, but actions that directly impact another person will hurt our witness.

My conviction is that the more you have a ‘discipleship curriculum for Christians’ and an ‘evangelistic curriculum for non-Christians,’ the more you are setting yourself up for this kind of heartbreak.

That is one reason to keep digging into Matthew 3 – 7. It links character transformation and evangelism. In fact, it does evangelism through character transformation. All because Jesus wants to heal and transform our human nature. So here are some more resources.

First, if you are interested in reading more devotional reflections on Matthew’s Gospel, please see <http://anastasiscenter.org/bible-messiah-matthew>. Most devotionals that I’ve read take a verse of Scripture and then use it as a springboard. Often, the thought or insight is a good one. But those devotionals didn’t help me understand the Scripture itself. So I decided to write one that does. If you are looking for short, digestible, missional, college-student-oriented, daily devotionals that help you get to know Scripture and almost always come with a practical challenge, check those out.

Second, here are some good books that might be helpful:

- Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*
- Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*
- Glen Stassen and Paul Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*
- D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*

Chapter 7: The Rest of the Gospel of Matthew

Here are some highlights of how I've benefited from sections of Matthew, either in preaching or small group study.

In my church, which is a small neighborhood-focused church, we experienced a few miraculous physical healings. Immediately, I turned to Matthew 8 – 10 to see Jesus' ten miracles of healing by his word. This helped us see Jesus' heart for physical healing, to inspire us to pray more. It also helped us connect Jesus' physical healing to his spiritual healing. The physical miracles were illustrations of a deeper miracle he wanted to do in others. So when some people weren't healed, we could still interpret the physical healings that did happen as illustrations, signs, for the larger community. Matthew 8 – 10 also helped us tie our newfound experience to Jesus' mission.

In student leadership meetings and also in sermons for the whole campus fellowship, I've used the parables of Matthew 13. They contain really valuable lessons about how the kingdom grows, and what our part in it is.

Matthew 14 – 18 is a really helpful part of Jesus' training of his disciples in what we would call multi-ethnic and multi-cultural ministry. In this section, Jesus led his disciples back and forth around the Galilee region, to serve Jews and Gentiles. The things that come up – the tendency to centralize ministry around a 'temple' compared to the value of going out to reach the lost, the disciples' ethnic-cultural prejudice, the importance of servanthood, what it means to 'move mountains,' how to nurture new Christians, and constructive confrontation – were immensely valuable.

Matthew 19 – 20 is a punchy section where Jesus was being very clear about how different his stands are on issues of sex, money, and power. Jesus was approaching Jerusalem for the last time and was being absolutely clear how his own movement differed from others around him.

At one fellowship, I led small groups in the Gospel of Matthew for two consecutive years. This helped to lay a foundation of emphasizing Jesus' new humanity in the fellowship. The study gave me the chance to challenge poor practices of reading Scripture and deepen people's appreciation for the literary artistry of Matthew and the poetic and pastoral genius of Jesus. This study helped students see that Jesus' first battle was not with individualistic 'legalism' per se, but with a whole host of other issues.

I've developed small group leader notes for all of Matthew, written a few messages on Matthew, and explored a few textual or thematic difficulties in Matthew. They can all be found here: <http://anastasiscenter.org/bible-messiah-matthew>.

Appendix: Where Does This ‘New Humanity’ Paradigm Come From?

Occasionally I get asked where this paradigm comes from. I understand that this is not what most Protestants and Catholics have said. Here’s a quick summary of the differences between the classical physical theory of the atonement (what I’m calling the ‘new humanity’ paradigm), still held by the entire Eastern Orthodox along with some Catholics and Protestants who are returning to the church’s earliest theology, and the penal substitution theory of the atonement which is held by a majority of Protestants.

<i>Theory of Atonement</i>	<i>Penal Substitution</i>	<i>Medical Substitution/Recapitulation</i>
The framework is	Legal/Judicial	Ontological/Medical
Human sin is	Wrong actions	Wrong condition
God is analogous to a	Judge	Surgeon
God’s wrath is directed at	Our personhood	The corruption in our human nature (Rom.1:18; 7:14 – 8:4)
Jesus dealt with human sin	At his death only	In himself, throughout his whole life
God’s wrath went from...to...?	God to God, or Father to Son (<i>upon</i> Jesus’ personhood)	Jesus’ divine nature to his fallen human nature (<i>within</i> Jesus’ personhood)
Jesus is the	Victim	Victor
God gives us	Forgiveness	Jesus’ new humanity, the renewed image of God, and forgiveness based on identity change
Our forgiveness is based on	Jesus exhausting the wrath of God	An identity change in us by virtue of Jesus’ connection to us
Jesus saves us from our	Punishment for guilt; the consequences of sin	Evil; the source of sin in each of us
The resurrection of Jesus is	Proof that God accepted Jesus’ self-sacrifice; it has no direct effect on us	God making a new humanity in Jesus, to share with us (2 Cor.5:17; Rom.6:1 – 11; Eph.1:15 – 2:10)
Our motivation for doing ministry, justice, etc.	Gratitude for debt-forgiveness	Our new identity in Christ
Our motivation is	Psychological	Ontological
At first glance, which world does God seem to care more about?	Next world	This world
The Person and Work of Jesus	Are divided	Are one in the same; the Person is the Work
Evangelism is	Saving souls from God’s wrath	Reshaping souls into the image of God
Jesus addresses social injustice	In our later spiritual growth (maybe)	At our conversion, right away, in us

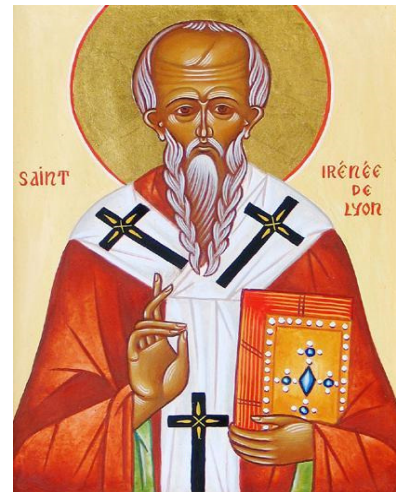
Most theologians and historians of the early church believe that the early church was united in upholding the broad Christus Victor theory for over a millennium. The varied language of Jesus as a healer, ransom, deliverer, and conqueror was used to denote Jesus being victorious over human sinfulness, death, and the devil.²⁸ Substitution, but not penal substitution, was clearly taught, for Jesus was victorious on our behalf and for our salvation. It was only Anselm of

²⁸ Gustav Aulen, *Christus Victor* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998, originally published 1930), chs.1 – 5

Canterbury who first articulated an atonement theory that positioned Jesus as a ‘satisfaction’ of ‘an attribute’ of God. In Anselm’s theory, Jesus satisfied God’s *honor*, which contributed to the idea that Jesus stored up a ‘treasury of merit’ others could access. Anselm could therefore leave the question of the scope of the atonement open, and genuinely open to human free will to choose Jesus. However, Anselm paved the way for John Calvin and others to position Jesus as satisfying God’s *retributive justice*, which became a broader category that was extended across people and across time, and which was understood in such a way that Jesus exhausted God’s wrath at one time, upholding God’s retributive justice on their behalf. Unlike Anselm’s theology where Jesus satisfied God’s honor in a personal way, giving others access, person by person, to his achievement, Calvin’s theology positioned Jesus against God’s justice in a categorical way, on behalf of the elect, all at once. This left no logical place for genuine human free will.

Irenaeus of Lyons

I will start with the first theologian outside the apostles: Irenaeus. Who was Irenaeus, and what did he have to say about Jesus’ atonement? Irenaeus (125 – 202 AD), was born in Smyrna in Asia Minor, where he studied under a Christian bishop named Polycarp, who reportedly had been a disciple of the apostle John. At some point before 177 AD, Irenaeus left Smyrna for Rome where he joined the school of Justin Martyr. He became bishop of Lyon in Roman Gaul, now modern France, in 178 AD. He was the earliest writing systematic theologian outside of the New Testament. He wrote a well researched critique of Gnosticism and a defense of Christian faith called *Against Heresies* between 175 and 185 AD.



Gnostic thought flowed out of the Greek philosophical dualism which opposed the world of intangible spirit against the world of physical matter. Gnostics believed that human beings were more fundamentally soul than body. In their ensuing belief system, they held various views of the body as inferior or irrelevant: the body would not be redeemed by God, therefore a person’s body was ethically unimportant and/or its desires must be suppressed completely.

This dualism stood in contradistinction from the Hebraic-Christian view which said that God in creation made physical things good, even the human body. The Gnostics wanted to deny the supremacy of the God of the Old Testament for His creation of matter; they posited another God higher than the Old Testament God. They denied the relation between the Old Testament and the New for its continuity along these lines. They denied the Incarnation of Jesus into truly a human nature because of their disdain for the human body. And they also denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which completed the incorporation of humanity’s physical nature into the very being of God.

Irenaeus understood that the entirety of biblical revelation, salvation, and the trustworthiness of God was at stake. Irenaeus knew that because of God’s original commitment to the physical world, God has acted in Christ to redeem not only the souls of people but also their bodies, and furthermore the creation story itself. Jesus’ incarnation and bodily resurrection is God’s affirmation of His commitment to physical matter in general, human bodies in particular, and the

creation story as a whole. After he demonstrates from Scripture that the Word of God himself took human flesh in Jesus,²⁹ Irenaeus says that Jesus saves human nature in himself by destroying the sin in himself.

Therefore, as I have already said, He caused man (human nature) to cleave to and to become, one with God. For unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished... But the law coming, which was given by Moses, and testifying of sin that it is a sinner, did truly take away his (death's) kingdom, showing that he was no king, but a robber; and it revealed him as a murderer. It laid, however, a weighty burden upon *man, who had sin in himself*, showing that he was liable to death. For as the law was spiritual, it merely made sin to stand out in relief, but did not destroy it. For sin had no dominion over the spirit, but over man. For it behooved *Him who was to destroy sin*, and redeem man under the power of death, that *He should Himself be made that very same thing which he was, that is, man*; who had been drawn by sin into bondage, but was held by death, so that *sin should be destroyed by man*, and man should go forth from death. For as by the disobedience of the one man who was originally moulded from virgin soil, the many were made sinners, and forfeited life; so was it necessary that, by the obedience of one man, who was originally born from a virgin, many should be justified and receive salvation. Thus, then, was the Word of God made man, as also Moses says: 'God, true are His works.' But if, not having been made flesh, He did appear as if flesh, His work was not a true one. But what He did appear, that He also was: God recapitulated *in Himself* the ancient formation of man, that *He might kill sin*, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true.³⁰

This is a very significant passage in Irenaeus. In it, he insists that Jesus came to resolve a problem within human nature itself, and offer back to us his renewed humanity. Irenaeus says this in three ways. First, he says here and elsewhere that Jesus took his humanity not from some other substance, like the virgin soil from which Adam was first taken, but from the virgin womb of Mary.³¹ The Word of God did this to partake of the same human nature that we all share, to renew it and save it. He did not start a different type of human being, because that would have been of no help to us! This is why Irenaeus constantly referred to Jesus' person and work as the 'recapitulation' – or the summing up, or literally, the re-heading up – of all humanity. Taking this concept from Paul (Eph.1:10), Irenaeus says that Jesus is the 'second Adam' (Rom.5:12 – 21; 1 Cor.15:21 – 22; 45 – 49) the one from whom a new life passes into all other human beings.

Second, here and elsewhere, Irenaeus refers to the 'ancient formation of man.' Irenaeus saw humanity as patterned after the Word-Son of God from the creation. That is, as the Son of God has always been the true image of God through whom the Father is made known (Col.1:15, Heb.1:3), human beings were formed in the image of the eternal Son of God to similarly make God known in the creation (Gen.1:26 – 27). That relation that human beings were intended to have with God external to God but by the Spirit, the Son of God originally and eternally has with

²⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.16

³⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7, emphasis mine; see also 2.12.4; 3.18.1; 5.1.3

³¹ 'Why, then, did not God again take dust, but wrought so that the formation should be made of Mary? It was that there might not be another formation called into being, nor any other which should [require to] be saved, but that the very same formation should be summed up [in Christ as had existed in Adam], the analogy having been preserved.' (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.21.10; cf. 3.22.1 – 2)

the Father within the Godhead by the Spirit. This is why the Son of God inhabited human flesh, to remake the likeness of God in a human person.

‘But who else is superior to, and more eminent than, that man who was formed after the likeness of God, except the Son of God, after whose image man was created? And for this reason He did in these last days exhibit the similitude; [for] the Son of God was made man, assuming the *ancient production* [of His hands] into His own nature.’³²

‘...man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God, the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. For the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God.’³³

Irenaeus’ theology of atonement is therefore rooted in the goodness of God’s physical creation of humanity, the creation story itself with humanity’s original mandate to increase in stature and maturity, and behind that, an inner-Trinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son in the Spirit. This last point led Karl Barth to say that the Son of God not only became the ‘second Adam’ in the human man Jesus of Nazareth; he was also the ‘first Adam,’ the pattern by which God made man, the Image of God behind the image of God. But because we have tarnished the image of God within ourselves, and damaged the *relation* between ourselves and God, Jesus came to restore it. So he exhibited the ‘similitude,’ that is, the similarity with us: ‘the Son of God was made man, assuming the ancient production [of His hands] into His own nature.’ Now, the ‘ancient’ pattern in which God created human beings is affirmed by the Son of God who served as the template for that pattern in the first place. Jesus has restamped human nature with the image of God again, and reconciled human nature to God into the correct relation which God originally intended.

Third, and most importantly, Irenaeus saw Jesus as having cleansed his own humanity of sin. Irenaeus understood human sin as being a physical corruption within human nature, a defacing of the image and likeness of God in physical form, and a breaking in the relationship between God and man internalized into human flesh and reproduced by the human mind. In a comment on Genesis 3, Irenaeus held that the physical corruption in humanity is synonymous with sin in us:

‘Wherefore also He drove him out of Paradise, and removed him far from the tree of life, not because He envied him the tree of life, as some venture to assert, but because He pitied him, [and did not desire] that he should continue a sinner for ever, nor that the sin which surrounded him should be immortal, and evil interminable and irremediable. But He set a bound to his [state of] sin, by interposing death, and thus causing sin to cease, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh, which should take place in the earth, so that man, ceasing at length to live to sin, and dying to it, might begin to live to God.’³⁴

³² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.33.4

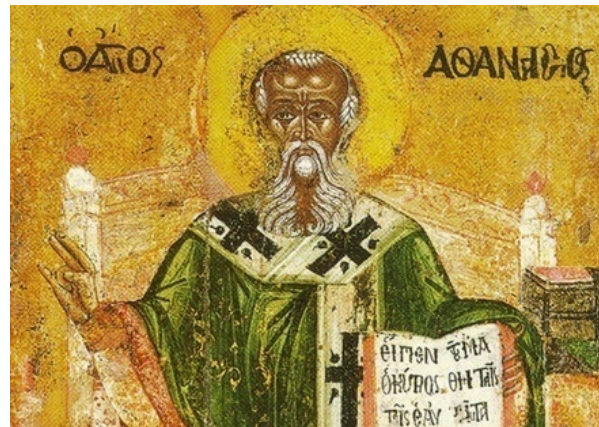
³³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.38.3

³⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.23.6

That is why, for Irenaeus, Jesus needed to physically save and redeem his own humanity first. As the Gospels demonstrate, Jesus put the flesh to death through his moment-by-moment choices to always align himself with the love of the Father, never giving into temptation. And as Paul said, God personally condemned, in this way, sin in the flesh of Jesus (Rom.8:3). On the cross, Jesus put to death the old self, the body of sin (Rom.6:6), to raise his body into newness of life. This constitutes salvation of human nature for Irenaeus, even if it only happened in one particular individual, Jesus. For Jesus has become the source of that salvation (Heb.5:9) for the Spirit takes what is his – namely his renewed God-cleansed, God-soaked humanity – and discloses it to us (Jn.16:14).³⁵ For Jesus represents all other Israelites and all other human beings, and did this on our behalf, that he might share his Spirit with all who believe and trust in him. In the physical body of Jesus, human nature is in principle brought into full union with God by virtue of Jesus overcoming all sin and temptation in his personal choices. We become ‘partakers’ of the Spirit, the ‘earnest of incorruption.’³⁶ This is why Irenaeus stressed that ‘man, who had sin in himself, showing that he was liable to death’ needed Jesus to cleanse and remove that sin from human nature. Thus, the corruption of human nature required the eternal Son of God ‘himself [to] be made that very same thing which he was, that is, man; who had been drawn by sin into bondage.’ When God took human flesh to himself, He ‘recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man’ in the physical body of Jesus. This, Irenaeus says, constitutes humanity’s ‘salvation’ which many should receive and be justified by participating in Christ by his Spirit. ‘Salvation’ is not merely the turning aside of the wrath of God, as penal substitution advocates think of it, but the purging of the sinful corruption within us by the wrath of God, that God’s life and power might be joined to the whole human person in the love of God.³⁷

Athanasius of Alexandria

Athanasius (296 – 373 AD) was bishop of Alexandria, Egypt during the tumultuous years of the Arian heresy. His opponents referred to him as a short, black man. He was a leading opponent of the Arian heresy; he was the main architect of the Nicene Creed; and he gave us the final form of the New Testament as consisting of the twenty-seven books we now recognize. So he is a very important figure in church history.



In oversimplified terms, whereas Irenaeus argued to preserve the full humanity of Jesus Christ, Athanasius argued to preserve his full deity. But interestingly enough, Athanasius reproduces Irenaeus’ atonement theory, even though he was approaching it from the opposite direction, from the standpoint of Jesus’ divinity rather than his humanity. Christ had to be understood as both fully divine and fully human. Why? So that God could unite Himself with humanity in the

³⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.20.3; 3.24.1; 5.6.1 – 2; 5.8.1 – 4

³⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.24.1

³⁷ Irenaeus later says, for example, that Jesus *saved* the physical material of human flesh and blood (*Against Heresies* 5.14.1 – 4). This theme runs throughout Irenaeus and demonstrates that he understood salvation as not merely a forensic forgiveness but an ontological union with the life of God through the person of Jesus and by the Spirit.

person of Jesus and overcome the problem of corruption and resistance to God embedded within human nature. Athanasius writes:

‘Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not of a subsequent corruption, repentance would have been well enough; but when once transgression had begun men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as creatures in the Image of God. No, repentance could not meet the case. What – or rather Who – was it that was needed for such grace and such recall as we required? Who, save the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing?... Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father... This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.’³⁸

This passage is very significant because Athanasius does two things. First, Athanasius asks us to imagine Adam and Eve making a small mistake or committing a small offense against God, each other, or their future children – a raised voice, an inappropriate gesture, an unthankful or wasteful attitude, a fearful self-defense, etc. And he says that if they had done this, ‘repentance would have been well enough,’ because God would have easily forgiven them that. In a day and age where Anselm’s satisfaction theory and Calvin’s penal substitution theory have so colored our view of God that we view any small offense against God as calling forth infinite, unlimited anger from Him, it is startling to find Athanasius casually dismissing it as beneath God. Many have simply not known what to do about this statement other than say that Athanasius must have been wrong.³⁹

Second, Athanasius says that the deep tragedy of the fall lies in the ‘subsequent corruption’ of humanity, not in God’s offended honor or justice, and not in the experience of human death. In Athanasius’ usage, ‘corruption’ means more than simply our mortality and eventual death. In his previous chapter, Athanasius also refers to moral, spiritual, and relational corruption as well:

‘When this happened, men began to die, and corruption ran riot among them and held sway over them to an even more than natural degree, because it was the penalty of which God had forewarned them for transgressing the commandment. Indeed, they had in their sinning surpassed all limits; for, having invented wickedness in the beginning and so involved themselves in death and corruption, they had gone on gradually from bad to worse, not stopping at any one kind of evil, but continually, as with insatiable appetite, devising new kinds of sins. Adulteries and thefts were everywhere, murder and rapine filled the earth, law was disregarded in corruption and injustice, all kinds of iniquities were perpetrated by all, both singly and in common. Cities were warring with cities, nations were rising against nations, and the whole earth was rent with factions and

³⁸ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 2:8 – 9

³⁹ E.g. Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p.163. Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007) sidestep this passage in Athanasius altogether. One suspects that they do so because it would completely ruin their attempt to enlist Athanasius into their camp.

battles, while each strove to outdo the other in wickedness. Even crimes contrary to nature were not unknown, but as the martyr-apostle of Christ says: ‘Their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature; and the men also, leaving the natural use of the woman, flamed out in lust towards each other, perpetrating shameless acts with their own sex, and receiving in their own persons the due recompense of their pervertedness.’⁴⁰

Corruption is an ontological and relational category for Athanasius, reflecting the ontological change and relational opposition to God that humanity acquired from Adam and Eve internalizing rebellion into their very selves, their spiritual *and* physical beings. Notice that corruption for Athanasius is not identical with death – as he separates the two when he says, ‘so involved themselves in death *and* corruption’ – although they are certainly connected.

The divine dilemma in the penal substitution theory postulates a conflict between God’s attributes (love and wrath). But in Athanasius, and in the medical (ontological) substitution theory, the divine dilemma was not internal to *God*, but external to Him and internal to *humanity*. Athanasius says that it was ‘monstrous and unfitting’ for human beings to degenerate spiritually, morally, and physically like this.

‘It was unworthy of the goodness of God that creatures made by Him should be brought to nothing through the deceit wrought upon man by the devil; and it was supremely unfitting that the work of God in mankind should disappear, either through their own negligence or through the deceit of evil spirits... It was impossible, therefore, that God should leave man to be carried off by corruption, because it would be unfitting and unworthy of Himself.’⁴¹

Whereas some aggressive exponents of the penal substitution theory say, perhaps out of sincere theological conviction, and perhaps for dramatic effect to play up God’s act of mercy in Jesus, that God could have let the whole humanity-creation project go to ruin and ultimately to hell (since they also conceive of hell as an eternal prison system), Athanasius would have found that view repulsive. It denigrates God’s love for humanity and goodness to say that God could have sat back and done nothing to save humanity in our fallen state. In Athanasius’ mind, God *had* to come in Jesus to bring us the salvation of human nature; He had no choice. God had a choice to create us and rest of creation; He could have chosen not to do that. But once He did, He was committed. He could not have chosen to ignore our fall into sin; that was not a choice open to His loving character.

Penal substitution theory also postulates that the object of God’s love and the object of God’s wrath are identical: our personhood. This is because the primary cultural context for Catholics and Protestants to draw up a model of God is the Latin judicial system of merit and penance, in which punishment must fall on *a person* for his disobedience to the law. I will highlight the significance of this misunderstanding below. The critical distinction Athanasius makes is that the object of God’s love is our personhood and the object of God’s wrath is the corruption in our nature. God’s love and God’s wrath *do not have the same object*. That is why the corruption in

⁴⁰ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 1.5

⁴¹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 2.6

Jesus' own body needed to be got rid of through his death as the very expression of God's love for us. God's wrath served God's love by purging away in Christ all that opposed intimate relationship with God.

'The Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death; yet He Himself, as the Word, being immortal and the Father's Son, was such as could not die. For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, through belonging to the Word Who is above all, might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all, and, itself remaining incorruptible through His indwelling, might thereafter put an end to corruption for all others as well, by the grace of the resurrection. It was by surrendering to death the body which He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for His human brethren by the offering of the equivalent. For naturally, since the Word of God was above all, when He offered His own temple and bodily instrument as a substitute for the life of all, He fulfilled in death all that was required. Naturally also, through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection. For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all. You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses; because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honored, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so is it with the King of all; He has come into our country and dwelt in one body amidst the many, and in consequence the designs of the enemy against mankind have been foiled and the corruption of death, which formerly held them in its power, has simply ceased to be. For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Savior of all the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death.'⁴²

Like Irenaeus (and Paul) before him, Athanasius says that God's resolution to this problem was first to have the Word-Son of God take on human flesh, resist the corruption inherent in human nature since the fall, and overcome it through death and resurrection. Athanasius affirms along with Irenaeus that Jesus lived a sinless life as 'an offering and sacrifice free from every stain,' even though he had taken on the same sin-ridden humanity we all have. The Word-Son of God 'assumed a body capable of death' in order to live and die and rise again. Athanasius viewed the resurrection as an essential part of God's act of salvation, because it was a salvation of human nature by ridding it of its sinful corruption and antagonism.

'The supreme object of His coming was to bring about the resurrection of the body. This was to be the monument to His victory over death, the assurance to all that He had Himself conquered corruption and that their own bodies also would eventually be incorrupt; and it was in token of that and as a pledge of the future resurrection that He kept His body incorrupt.'⁴³

Here is where penal substitution advocates flatly contradict Athanasius himself and place a heavy emphasis where Athanasius would not. Some say, 'For Athanasius, then, Jesus' death was

⁴² Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 2.9

⁴³ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 4.22

the purpose of the incarnation; the immortal Son of God needed to become man to die.’⁴⁴ Failing to grasp Athanasius’ central theological concern that Jesus bring forth a purified, resurrected humanity in his own person, free of the stain of sin’s corruption, they also ignore the corruption of human nature as the central problem God was trying to resolve. Instead, they say that Jesus’ death was God’s way of inverting His own punishment so that, by punishing Jesus with death, death would now serve as the gateway to resurrection. ‘God became man in order to save sinful humanity from the divine curse on creation that is God’s punishment for sin, and Christ accomplished this by enduring and exhausting this curse in our place, as our substitute.’⁴⁵ Athanasius’ point is not that God wanted to simply bring Jesus under death to satisfy divine justice. Death is not identical with the definition of ‘corruption’ for Athanasius. Corruption, as Athanasius defined it, is not simply our physical mortality. Corruption for Athanasius, as I have shown above, is a weakening of human nature’s spiritual compass, a twisting and distorting of our original inclination towards God, and a genetic infection within us that leads to moral degeneracy and spiritual resistance to God. Corruption is distinct from simply ‘death’ or ‘mortality.’ Thus, for Jesus to die in our place is an act of joining us in death, of sharing in our whole condition, not an act of diverting an invisible torment from us to him.

Many more writings might be quoted to show how long and how faithfully Christians preserved this view. In fact, anyone who holds a different view has the responsibility to explain why he or she differs from the earliest theology of the church. Because John Calvin has been such an influential theologian, let me go straight to him. Here is what John Calvin said about the significance of Jesus’ death:

‘When it is asked how, after abolishing sins, Christ removed the discord between us and God and acquired a righteousness, it may be replied generally that he provided us with this by the whole course of his obedience...From the moment he put on the person of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation for our redemption...In order, however, to define the manner of salvation more surely, scripture ascribes it to Christ’s death as its property and attribute. Yet there is no exclusion of the rest of the obedience which he performed in his life; as Paul comprehends the whole of it, from the beginning to the end, when he says, ‘he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross’...Nor was this without inward conflict, because he had taken our infirmities, and it was necessary to give this proof of his obedience to his Father. And it was no mean specimen of his incomparable love to us, to contend with horrible fear, and amid those dreadful torments to neglect all care of himself, that he might promote our benefit.’⁴⁶

Calvin himself says that Jesus’ life was atoning, not just his death. His whole life was the undoing of human sin and the forging of a new humanity in an actual human life. So anyone who says that Jesus’ death alone is what matters in Calvinist theology isn’t reading Calvin himself! In other places, Calvin appears to make this a subsidiary part of the penal substitution atonement theory where Jesus absorbs the punishment for human guilt. Therefore he limits the atonement to the elect by the decree of the Father. He diverges from Irenaeus and Athanasius,

⁴⁴ Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), p.172

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.173

⁴⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes* 2.16.5

who saw Jesus as God’s new humanity for all humanity, addressing the corruption in each one of us. But in this particular, limited instance, and for my purposes here, Calvin says it well.

For more information, look up ‘Medical Substitution’ or ‘Recapitulation’ (in the earliest, classical patristic writings and the Eastern Orthodox tradition⁴⁷) and ‘Total Substitution’ and ‘Real Exchange’ (in C.S. Lewis and in the Reformed stream of Karl Barth and T.F. Torrance⁴⁸; and represented by Catholics like J.R.R. Tolkien, Hans Urs von Balthazar, Thomas Weinandy, and Eleonore Stump).⁴⁹ This understanding of Jesus’ work is ontological and relational in its foundations, not merely legal or penal.

⁴⁷ A subset of the broader ‘Christus Victor’ theory of the atonement and what the Eastern Orthodox call ‘theosis.’ See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 3, ch.18.7; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, chs.2 – 5; Augustine, *On the Trinity*, book 13, chs.11 – 16; John of Damascus, *Orthodoxy*, book 3, ch.14; Stanley P. Rosenberg, ‘Interpreting Atonement in Augustine’s Preaching’, edited by Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James, *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), p.233 – 8; Gustav Aulen, *Christus Victor* (1930); Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976), p.135 – 55; Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London, England: Pelican Books, 1997) p.221 – 5

⁴⁸ E.g. C.S. Lewis, ‘The Perfect Penitent’, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1952), p.157; Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Helmets and Howard Publishers, 1992) and *Incarnation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), p.61 – 67; Thomas H. McCall, *Forsaken: The Trinity, the Cross, and Why it Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012); for helpful online messages, see Grace Communion International, <http://www.gci.org/yi>.

⁴⁹ E.g. Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh* (T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1993). For more information on the medical substitution atonement theory, especially in contrast with other atonement theories, please see www.anastasiscenter.org/atonement