

JESUS' MANIFESTO



Discussion Questions

Mar 8: The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-16)

Not This, But That: A Transformed Life
Matthew Dyer, CRCC Lead Pastor

1. Take some time to share how you experienced the practices from last week. How did they impact your daily life? Did you notice any changes over the course of the week? How might this practice help you on a regular basis in the future?
2. This passage is bookended by some challenging statements from Jesus in Matthew 5:17-20 and Matthew 5:48. What do you think Jesus means by these statements? Why do you think Jesus seems to be setting such a high standard? How does this make you feel?
3. Jesus addresses six areas of human brokenness in this passage. These are:
 - Murder (Matthew 5:21-26)
 - Adultery (Matthew 5:27-30)
 - Divorce (Matthew 5:31-32)
 - Oaths (Matthew 5:33-37)
 - Revenge (Matthew 5:38-42)
 - Hatred (Matthew 5:43-47)

Discuss each of them with the following as a guide:

- What is the external behavior Jesus is addressing, and what is the internal motivation to which he connects it?
 - Take note of where Jesus uses metaphor, imagery, hyperbole and poetry. How does this impact his meaning?
 - What alternative way of living is Jesus offering in each of these “antitheses”?
 - The speaker on Sunday suggested that focusing only on our outward behaviors can cause us to live life in a way that tries to keep God happy but at a safe distance. Do you agree with this? In what way could this be a tendency in each of these issues? In what way is this a challenge to you personally?
 - If God is Love, and more intimately present to us even than our breath, how might this affect the way we read these passages and embrace these challenges?
 - If God is Love and we are already completely accepted, how might this impact how we see and treat others? In what way could this be a source of empowerment to let go of the need to dehumanize, compete with, withdraw from, and defeat others?
4. If Jesus was speaking to a religious crowd today, what might be the “antitheses” issues he would address? How would they be similar to the ones in Matthew 5? How would they be different?

5. If Jesus was speaking directly to you today, what might be the “antitheses” issues he would address? How would you respond?

Prayer practice for this week: The Examen

This practice is based on an ancient Ignatian spiritual exercise called “the Examen” and is best practiced at the end of each day.

Sit quietly and take a moment to center yourself. Then “relive” your day in your imagination by allowing your thoughts to guide you through the day’s events. As you do this, focus particularly on your interactions with others – in your family, at work or school, in your neighborhood or online. These “interactions” might be your internal thoughts or attitudes, or they could be actual conversations and encounters. Do this without judging yourself but simply notice and ask the following two questions:

1. At what times during your day are you now conscious that you embodied God’s presence of love? What happened? What were your inner motivations and why did they prevail? What was the outcome?
2. At what times during your day are you now conscious that you were resistant to or withdrawn from God’s presence of love? What happened? What were your inner motivations and why did they prevail? What was the outcome?

When you have finished reflecting on your day, continue to sit quietly without self-judgment. Invite God’s presence and allow yourself to sink deeply into God’s total acceptance – feel this love as the source of hope and courage for you as you let go of fear. How could you be more aware of your negative motivations and invite God into those moments tomorrow? What factors seemed to nurture your positive motivations and how could you perpetuate those? Close by inviting God’s love to help you live more consciously from this center.

Alternative Practice: Drawing the Day

If silent reflection does not feel natural for you, try a visual version of the Examen. Take a few minutes at the end of the day to doodle or sketch your day. Use simple drawings, shapes, or words to represent moments and interactions that stood out to you. Include times when you sensed yourself embodying God’s love. Underline, circle, or highlight those places so they stand out on the page.

Also include moments when you felt resistant, reactive, withdrawn, or unloving. You might represent these with darker colors, quick sketches, or a few honest words. Notice them without judging yourself.

When you’ve finished, spend a moment looking at the whole page. Then gently cover the resistant places with new colors, patterns, textures, or designs. Let the page become a reminder that God’s love surrounds every part of your day, holding both your growth and your struggles in complete acceptance.