

Matthew

Author

Although it is technically anonymous, early Christian tradition assigned the authorship of this Gospel to the apostle Matthew.

Date

AD 55–65

Summary

Matthew was a tax collector. Ordinarily, such a profession would keep an individual from most people's social network pages. But Matthew suffered far more than the occasional internet snub; his job was to collect taxes from his own people, then turn the funds over to a foreign government that held his own people in captivity. How did Matthew get involved in this profession? He literally had to bid for the right to secure this extremely lucrative position. He "sold" the Roman government on his ability to be thorough and productive. Then once he secured the job, Matthew had to "sell" the Jews on their responsibility to pay their fair share to the Romans.

Any sales rep will tell you that his or her greatest ally in closing the deal is information—irrefutable evidence that the product is sound. Is it any wonder Matthew's story is filled with more verifying documentation—Old Testament confirmation that Jesus Christ is really is the Son of God, the long-awaited and promised Messiah—than the other accounts of Jesus's life? It's no surprise if you're a salesman like Matthew.

Key Verses

Matthew 28:19–20: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Takeaway

The Great Commission that concludes Matthew's Gospel (Mt 28:16–20) informs us that the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of the world, has appointed us and will enable us to make disciples of all who will believe.

Principle to Live By

The Great Commission (Mt 28:16–20)

Since the Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again to bring salvation to all who believe, we are to do what we can to deliver this message to the whole world.

Outline

- I. Birth and Infancy of Jesus (1:1–2:23)
- II. Beginning of Jesus's Ministry in Galilee (3:1–4:25)
- III. Discourse One: The Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29)
- IV. Jesus's First Miracles (8:1–9:38)
- V. Discourse Two: Ministry of Jesus's Disciples (10:1–42)
- VI. Responses to Jesus's Ministry (11:1–12:50)
- VII. Discourse Three: Parables about the Kingdom (13:1–58)
- VIII. Close of Jesus's Ministry in Galilee (14:1–17:27)
- IX. Discourse Four: Character of Jesus's Disciples (18:1–35)
- X. Jesus's Ministry on the Way to Jerusalem (19:1–20:34)
- XI. Jesus's Ministry in Jerusalem (21:1–23:39)
- XII. Discourse Five: Olivet Discourse (24:1–25:46)
- XIII. Betrayal, Crucifixion, and Burial (26:1–27:66)
- XIV. Resurrection and Commission (28:1–20)

Timeline

Abraham	2166–1991	2200–1800 BC
Isaac	2066–1886	
Jacob	2006–1859	
Joseph	1915–1805	
Moses	1526–1406	1526–1000 BC
Exodus	1446	
Joshua	1490?–1380?	
Destruction of Jericho	1406	
Judges	1380?–1060?	
Ruth	1175?–1125?	
Samuel	1105?–1025?	
Saul	1080?–1010	
David	1050?–970	
Solomon	990?–931	1000–586 BC
Rehoboam	971?–913	
Jeroboam	971–909	
Fall of the northern kingdom	722	
Fall of the southern kingdom	586	
Babylonian exile	586–538	
Temple completed	515	586–63 BC
Greeks thwart Persian expansion into Europe with victories at Plataea and Mycale.	479	
Jerusalem's walls completed	445	
Alexander the Great invades Persia.	334	
Greek control of Palestine	323–167	
Years of Jewish independence	167–63	
Roman dominance begins.	63	
Jesus's birth	Winter 5 BC	
Herod the Great's death	4 BC	
John the Baptist's ministry begins	AD 29	
Jesus's ministry begins	29	5 BC–AD 33
Jesus's final week	March 28–April 3, 33	
Jesus's resurrection	April 5, 33	
Jesus's ascension	May 14, 33	
Feast of Pentecost	May 24, 33	

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

1 An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

From Abraham to David

- ² Abraham fathered^a Isaac,
Isaac fathered Jacob,
Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers,
³ Judah fathered Perez and Zerah
by Tamar,
Perez fathered Hezron,
Hezron fathered Aram,
⁴ Aram fathered Amminadab,
Amminadab fathered Nahshon,
Nahshon fathered Salmon,
⁵ Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab,
Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth,
Obed fathered Jesse,
⁶ and Jesse fathered King David.

From David to the Babylonian Exile

- David fathered Solomon^b
by Uriah's wife,
⁷ Solomon fathered Rehoboam,
Rehoboam fathered Abijah,
Abijah fathered Asa,^c
⁸ Asa^c fathered Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat fathered Joram,^d
Joram fathered Uzziah,
⁹ Uzziah fathered Jotham,
Jotham fathered Ahaz,
Ahaz fathered Hezekiah,
¹⁰ Hezekiah fathered Manasseh,
Manasseh fathered Amon,^e
Amon fathered Josiah,
¹¹ and Josiah fathered Jeconiah
and his brothers
at the time of the exile to Babylon.

From the Exile to the Messiah

- ¹² After the exile to Babylon
Jeconiah fathered Shealtiel,
Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel,
¹³ Zerubbabel fathered Abiud,
Abiud fathered Eliakim,
Eliakim fathered Azor,
¹⁴ Azor fathered Zadok,
Zadok fathered Achim,
Achim fathered Eliud,
¹⁵ Eliud fathered Eleazar,
Eleazar fathered Matthan,
Matthan fathered Jacob,
¹⁶ and Jacob fathered Joseph
the husband of Mary,
who gave birth to Jesus
who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations; and from David until the exile to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the exile to Babylon until the Messiah, fourteen generations.

The Nativity of the Messiah

¹⁸ The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged^f to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ So her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

²⁰ But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ **See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel,^g**
which is translated "God is with us."

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her ²⁵ but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son.^h And he named him Jesus.

Wise Men Visit the King

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him."ⁱ

³ When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born.

⁵ "In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet:

⁶ **And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."^j**

^a1:2 In vv. 2–16 either a son, as here, or a later descendant, as in v. 8 ^b1:6 Other mss add *King* ^c1:7,8 Other mss read *Asaph*

^d1:8 = Jehoram ^e1:10 Other mss read *Amos* ^f1:18 Or *betrothed* ^g1:23 Is 7:14 ^h1:25 Other mss read *to her firstborn son*

ⁱ2:2 Or *to pay him homage* ^j2:6 Mc 5:2

DAY 149 — INSIGHT FOR THE DAY

Are You in Here?

Passage for the Day: Matthew 1:1–2, 16–17

An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ,
the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

Matthew 1:1

No one wants to be called a “late bloomer.” But in high school, that was me. Given my smaller stature compared to other boys, these four years were a lot of work. Thankfully, something in my hereditary constitution did not allow me to give up. I tried out for several sports, and even though my name never made the final list posted on the coach’s door, I kept trying. It seemed to me that I could make up for my size and inexperience by hustling just a little more than the other boys.

Although I never made a varsity squad in high school, I *did* finish my precollege career with some of my dignity intact. I made many wonderful friends, was involved by performing in the school’s talent show, and participated in several other enjoyable clubs and organizations. *At least*, I remember thinking, *I’ll have a good list of activities next to my name in my senior yearbook.*

The day we received our yearbooks was a day I’ll never forget. I had just been handed my copy of the *1965 Wheaton Community High School Ilium*, and I quickly scanned the senior pages. And there, right between the pictures of Dennis Wiss and Ann Woodward, where I had found myself lined up in every study hall for four years was . . . nothing. I looked again, quickly turning the adjacent pages to see if, perhaps, I had been listed out of sequence. Again I found nothing. My heart stopped.

Filled with terror (remember I was a teenager), I turned to find someone to tell. Standing five feet from me was Meredith Poe, my friend and our yearbook editor. “I’m not in here,” I said to Meredith. “You completely missed me.” Quickly thumbing through her own, she confirmed my assertion. “I’m so sorry,” she finally said to me, her face turning ashen, “Oh, no . . . uh . . . I’m so . . . so sorry.” She repeated, turned, and walked away.

The genealogies in Matthew are about as stem-winding as reading the names of students in a yearbook—unless you’re looking for your own name. Then it’s an adventure to search and a victory to find. Unless, of course, your name is inadvertently missed. Then it’s a heartbreak.

Matthew’s list of the Messiah’s ancestors starts with Abraham and stops with Jesus’s name, “the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (v. 1). What you may not know is that from the birth of Jesus, this list continues. Of course, this extended genealogy is not found in the Bible. It is, however, listed in what the apostle John called “the book of life of the Lamb” (Rv 13:8). This “yearbook” we hear about in the book of Revelation does not have anything to do with ancestral lineage or bloodline.

The names recorded in the Lamb’s book, the most important yearbook in the history of eternity, are there because of a different kind of “bloodline”: the sacrificial blood of Jesus. Those who show up in this book are not there by birth: they are all *adopted* into God’s family. That list of grandfathers and grandchildren will also end with Jesus Christ.

Matthew and the other Gospel writers tell the story of how to get on this list. If you miss this one, it won’t be Meredith Poe’s fault.

⁷Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”^A

⁹After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. ⁸Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

The Flight into Egypt

¹³After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Get up! Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to kill him.” ¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt. ¹⁵He stayed there until Herod’s death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: **Out of Egypt I called my Son.**^C

The Massacre of the Innocents

¹⁶Then Herod, when he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

¹⁸ **A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping,^p and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children;
and she refused to be consoled,
because they are no more.**^E

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰saying, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, because those who intended to kill the child are dead.” ²¹So he got up, took the child and his mother, and entered the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.

And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the region of Galilee. ²³Then he went and settled in a town called Nazareth to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

The Herald of the Messiah

3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea² and saying, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!”³ For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said:

**A voice of one crying out
in the wilderness:
Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight!**^F

⁴Now John had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him,⁶ and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

⁷When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸Therefore produce fruit consistent with^G repentance. ⁹And don’t presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. ¹⁰The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with^H water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove^I his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out.”

The Baptism of Jesus

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?”

¹⁵Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John allowed him to be baptized.

¹⁶When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens

^A2:8 Or and pay him homage ^B2:11 Or they paid him homage ^C2:15 Hs 11:1 ^D2:18 Other mss read Ramah, lamentation, and weeping, ^E2:18 Jr 31:15 ^F3:3 Is 40:3 ^G3:8 Lit fruit worthy of ^H3:11 Or in ^I3:11 Or to carry

DAY 150 — INSIGHT FOR THE DAY

Redford, Joseph, and God's Son

Passage for the Day: Matthew 1:18–25

When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her
Matthew 1:24

I'll never forget Redford, partly because his was such an unusual first name but mostly because of his story.

One of Redford's closest friends in the small North Dakota town where he grew up fell in love with the cutest girl in school. Emily was everything a red-blooded teenage boy could have hoped for: happy, energetic, talkative, beautiful, and willing. Late one night, Redford's friend called him. "She's pregnant," he said, his voice bursting through the phone lines. "What am I going to do?"

"What does Emily want to do?" Redford asked.

"Go away, have the baby, put it up for adoption, and then come back," Redford's friend replied. "She's not putting any pressure on me to marry her, so I think this is a good plan." Redford just listened.

Emily quietly disappeared. Life in rural North Dakota returned to normal, unimpeded by the predictable soft questions and whispers.

Redford graduated from the local high school, then attended the county's junior college, just a few miles east on Interstate 94. After receiving his associate's degree, Redford took a job with a local merchant.

Two years later, an afternoon Greyhound bus brought Emily home. The locals were shocked to see her back, especially with three children in tow. In one hand she held the hand of a five-year-old boy with familiar blonde hair and blue eyes, recognizable gifts from his well-known daddy. In the other hand was the hand of a striking, dark-skinned girl. She looked to be about three. And strapped to Emily's chest in one of those canvas slings was a newborn. The town's cheerleader-turned-woman-of-the-world had come home. And instinctively everyone *knew* that each of these children was hers.

When Redford heard the news, he immediately looked for Emily. Her parents had mercifully invited her to live with them, and their living room is where he found her, feeding her baby. Kneeling on the floor beside Emily, Redford tenderly put his arms around his old friend. "I'm so glad to see you," he said, his arms embracing both the girl and her tiny baby. "Welcome home."

In the weeks that followed, Redford renewed the friendship with his high school best friend's girl. He visited Emily and her children regularly, offering to help however he could. In what seemed like no time at all, he was hopelessly in love. In six months they were married, and today, Redford, Emily, and their little eclectic family live in a frame house, just inside the city limits of the same North Dakota town.

Joseph was faced with the dilemma of a lifetime. Mary, his precious fiancée, was pregnant. Incredibly, she claimed to still be a virgin. *A virgin?* he must have muttered to himself, *I wasn't born yesterday.* But in a dream, the angel of the Lord told Joseph to take Mary as his wife. "This child is from the Holy Spirit," the angel told him, "and this baby's going to save His people from their sins." So in a quiet ceremony, Joseph married Mary, tenderly taking her into his home.

Two thousand years later, you and I, once wayward and unfaithful boys ourselves, have become part of this same family, the family of Jesus Christ, Joseph and Mary's boy. God's loving embrace is the best news we could ever receive. So He welcomed us to live with Him.

Thanks, Redford, for your mercy. Thanks, Joseph, for your faithfulness. Thank You, heavenly Father, for Your grace.

suddenly opened for him,^a and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him.¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

The Temptation of Jesus

➤ **4** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.² After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.³ Then the tempter approached him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

⁴ He answered, "It is written: **Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**"^b

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city, 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 give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."^c

⁷ Jesus told him, "It is also written: **Do not test the Lord your God.**"^d

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.⁹ And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me."^e

¹⁰ Then Jesus told him, "Go away,^f Satan! For it is written: **Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.**"^g

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.

Ministry in Galilee

¹² When he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.¹³ He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.¹⁴ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ **Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.**

¹⁶ **The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.**^{h,i}

Insight for the Moment

Sword Play

Matthew 4:1–11

The apostle Paul referred to Scripture—the written Word of God—as a sword (Eph 6:17). Face-to-face with Satan for forty days in the wilderness, even though He didn't identify it as such, Jesus effectively used this metaphorical weapon. In spite of tremendous temptation, Jesus depended on the Word and, with His words, leveled the great adversary.

Here's a great example of what we need in living and leading our families—storing up the Word of God in our minds and sharpening that memory each day. Then, when temptations come, we will be able to defend ourselves.

It's a good idea to find creative ways to incorporate Scripture memorization into your life and your children's lives. Identify passages that speak directly to issues they're dealing with. Then you'll be able to pull out your sword at a moment's notice, claiming God's promises in difficult times. "En garde, Satan."

¹⁷ From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near."

The First Disciples

¹⁸ As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter), and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.¹⁹ "Follow me," he told them, "and I will make you fish for^j people."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 his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, preparing their nets, and he called them.²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Teaching, Preaching, and Healing

²³ Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every^k disease and sickness^l among the people.²⁴ Then the news about him spread throughout Syria.

^a3:16 Other mss omit *for him* ^b4:4 Dt 8:3 ^c4:6 Ps 91:11–12 ^d4:7 Dt 6:16 ^e4:9 Or *and pay me homage* ^f4:10 Other mss read *"Get behind me* ^g4:10 Dt 6:13 ^h4:16 Lit *dawned on them* ⁱ4:15–16 Is 9:1–2 ^j4:19 Or *you fishers of* ^k4:23 Or *every kind of* ^l4:23 Or *physical ailment*

So they brought to him all those who were afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pains, the demon-possessed, the epileptics, and the paralytics. And he healed them. ²⁵Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

The Sermon on the Mount

5 When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then^a he began to teach them, saying:

The Beatitudes

- ³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
- ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- ⁵ Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.
- ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
- ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
- ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

¹¹“You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. ¹²Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Believers Are Salt and Light

¹³“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty?^b It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they

may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Christ Fulfills the Law

¹⁷“Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter^c or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

Murder Begins in the Heart

²¹“You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, **Do not murder**,^d and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. ²²But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister^e will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults^f his brother or sister will be subject to the court.^g Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire.^h ²³So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Reach a settlement quickly with your adversary while you’re on the way with him to the court, or your adversary will hand you over to the judge, and the judge toⁱ the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I tell you, you will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny.^j

Adultery Begins in the Heart

²⁷“You have heard that it was said, **Do not commit adultery**.^k ²⁸But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

^a5:2 Lit *Then opening his mouth* ^b5:13 Or *how can the earth be salted?* ^c5:18 Or *not one iota*; *iota* is the smallest letter of the Gk alphabet. ^d5:21 Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17 ^e5:22 Other mss add *without a cause* ^f5:22 Lit *Whoever says ‘Raca’*; an Aramaic term of abuse that puts someone down, insulting one’s intelligence ^g5:22 Lit *Sanhedrin* ^h5:22 Lit *the gehenna of fire* ⁱ5:25 Other mss read *judge will hand you over to* ^j5:26 Lit *quadrans*, the smallest and least valuable Roman coin, worth 1/64 of a daily wage ^k5:27 Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18

DAY 151 — INSIGHT FOR THE DAY

Ready, Aim, Speak

Passage for the Day: Matthew 5:21–25, 33–37

“But let your ‘yes’ mean ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ mean ‘no.’
Anything more than this is from the evil one.”

Matthew 5:37

Taylor University, my college alma mater, had a dinnertime custom for many years. Folklore had it that, over the years, many women had transferred to other schools because of this tradition.

Every weekday evening at exactly six, the doors of the dining hall would open, but only for the women. The ladies would stream in, filling every other seat at the round, eight-person tables. They made this processional to the strains of an ancient upright piano in the corner, played, of course, by a music major.

Once the dining hall was exactly half-filled, the men were released, set free to prowl the tables, looking for somewhere to sit. In selecting the chair they wanted, they were also choosing where they *didn't* want to spend their dinner hour. Now you know why the women hated this practice.

Women students—and a few brave men—serving food family style, waited on tables. I'm sure a homey atmosphere with pleasant conversation is what the well-intentioned founders of the tradition had wanted to create. And most of the time, the family thing worked well. Most of the time.

One dinner in the spring of my freshman year, I was sitting with seven of my classmates—three other men and four women. We were engaged in the usual college chatter when someone mentioned the breakup of one of Taylor's “fixture” couples. He was a sophomore; she was a freshman—one of our own.

All the side conversations at the table stopped immediately. Everyone wanted to hear about the big breakup. We weren't being hateful, mind you, just “fully informed.” One of the women gave the report that it was Paula's decision to break off the relationship. “Irreconcilable differences,” she said. “Paula loved Michael, but there was just no future in it.”

“That's not what I heard,” I announced, holding a virtual court, my voice raised to an unnecessary level. “I heard that Michael let her have it. He hadn't liked her all that much and just told her so. He broke her heart, but oh, well, these things happen.” I was a veritable fountain of gossip that evening, and everyone was listening.

When I finished my thorough report, I took a breath and looked up into the faces of my classmates. They were ashen, gazing at me in disbelief. The men in particular looked sick. As I looked more closely, I discovered that they weren't actually looking at me. They were looking just above me at—you guessed it—our family-style waitress.

I jerked around in my chair to see who had captured their attention. It was Paula. I will remember that moment for the rest of my life—how I felt sitting there, trapped in the crossfire of my friend's pain and the disbelieving stares of my tablemates. I don't recall ever, before or since, feeling such embarrassment, such shame.

Words have unbelievable power. Clustered together well, they can restore and renew your family. They can lift your children's hearts and heal their spirits. Words can refresh a child's self-confidence, but words can also cause incredible pain. And once spoken, they can never be unsaid.

Jesus was reminding His followers of the remarkable strength of spoken words. He was telling them that mouths are like loaded guns, and words are like the deadly bullets that fly from them.

Protect your children from sniper fire—from one another and from you. The life you save may be your own.

Divorce Practices Censured

³¹“It was also said, **Whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.**^a ³²But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Tell the Truth

³³“Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, **You must not break your oath, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord.**^b ³⁴But I tell you, don’t take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God’s throne; ³⁵or by the earth, because it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. ³⁶Do not swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. ³⁷But let your ‘yes’ mean ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ mean ‘no.’ Anything more than this is from the evil one.

Go the Second Mile

³⁸“You have heard that it was said, **An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.**^c ³⁹But I tell you, don’t resist^d an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. ⁴¹And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴²Give to the one who asks you, and don’t turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Love Your Enemies

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, **Love your neighbor^e** and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴But I tell you, love your enemies^f and pray for those who^g persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be^h children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentilesⁱ do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

How to Give

6“Be careful not to practice your righteousness^k in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven. ²So whenever you give to the poor, don’t sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. ³But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^l

How to Pray

⁵“Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^m ⁷When you pray, don’t babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. ⁸Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.

The Lord’s Prayer

⁹“Therefore, you should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,
your name be honored as holy.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.ⁿ

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us into^o temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.^p

¹⁴“For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. ¹⁵But if you don’t forgive others,^o your Father will not forgive your offenses.

How to Fast

¹⁶“Whenever you fast, don’t be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. ¹⁷But when you

^a5:31 Dt 24:1 ^b5:33 Lv 19:12; Nm 30:2; Dt 23:21 ^c5:38 Ex 21:24; Lv 24:20; Dt 19:21 ^d5:39 Or *don’t set yourself against, or don’t retaliate against* ^e5:43 Lv 19:18 ^f5:44 Other mss add *bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you,* ^g5:44 Other mss add *mistreat you and* ^h5:45 Or *may become, or may show yourselves to be* ⁱ5:47 Or *doing that is superior; lit doing more* ^j5:47 Other mss read *tax collectors* ^k6:1 Other mss read *charitable giving* ^l6:4 Other mss read *will himself reward you openly* ^m6:6 Other mss add *openly* ⁿ6:11 Or *our necessary bread, or our bread for tomorrow* ^o6:13 Or *do not cause us to come into* ^p6:13 Or *from evil; some later mss add For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.* ^q6:15 Other mss add *their wrongdoing*

DAY 152 — INSIGHT FOR THE DAY

Show Us How to Pray

Passage for the Day: Matthew 6:5–13

“When you pray, don’t babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.”

Matthew 6:7–8

Several years ago, my older daughter was teaching fifth grade at a Christian school in North Carolina. Classes would begin each day with an open prayer time. Missy asked each student for requests, and then she would invite anyone to be a part of the experience—to pray out loud.

One morning, a boy began praying for his dog. “Dear God,” he began, “please bless Rascal today.” Missy held her breath. “Please help him to be obedient to my mom while I’m here at school. And please help him not to run out into the busy street in front of our house.” Fortunately, the boy didn’t give God his home address. Unfortunately, he wasn’t finished. “And Lord, please help Rascal get rid of his nasty ringworm.”

Missy silently gasped, but none of the children laughed. No one even made a sound. Of course, *the children were* silently praying for Rascal’s ringworm, which seemed perfectly reasonable to them.

When Missy told me this story, I remember thinking how good it is that children are so comfortable with God that they can bring their most important concerns boldly into His holy throne room.

When it comes to prayer—either on their own or with their children—many dads are stymied. “I am comfortable asking God to bless our food,” they tell me. “But beyond that, I’m kind of lost.”

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus gave us a wonderful pattern to follow when we pray, either alone or kneeling with our kids before bedtime. Maybe you’d like to give this a try:

Praise and thank You. When you pray, always begin by thanking God for His goodness. If your child is young when you start this, you’re going to hear your heavenly Father get thanked for a whole lot of interesting things: birds, bicycles, Grandma, a new box of Cap’n Crunch® cereal. That’s OK, let it roll. You’re helping your children remember that everything they have—including life itself—is a precious gift from God’s hand.

Please forgive me. You probably won’t have too much difficulty with this since most children have a great deal of sensitivity about their own shortcomings. But it’s still important that you help them identify specifics. “Forgive me for not sharing my toys with Jennifer” when she’s three will translate to seeking God’s grace when life gets a lot more complex and dangerous.

Requests. Like their lists of thank-yous, this might be a long one: “Bless Uncle Fred and Aunt Blanche. Bless my trucks (or my dolls). Bless my mom and my dad (Amen to that). Please help us have a sunny day for the picnic tomorrow.” Again, it’s OK. Let this happen. Your child is learning that the sovereign Lord of the universe is a God of blessing—of good and perfect gifts.

And finally, close the prayer with one more statement of gratitude.

There you have it—a bird’s-eye view of the Lord’s Prayer. Take the opportunity to *teach* this. If it means having your child repeat phrases after you, that’s fine. In no time, you and your child will get the hang of it.

Think of it. You are ushering your family into the presence of a holy God. You’re teaching them how to speak to Him, knowing He’s eager to listen. This is good.

fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,¹⁸ so that your fasting isn't obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^A

God and Possessions

¹⁹“Don't store up for yourselves treasures^B on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness!

²⁴“No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

The Cure for Anxiety

- ²⁵“Therefore I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? ²⁷Can any of you add one moment to his life span^C by worrying? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. ³⁰If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't he do much more for you — you of little faith? ³¹So don't worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³²For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God^D and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. ³⁴Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Do Not Judge

7 “Do not judge, so that you won't be judged. ²For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you

Insight for the Moment

Trust God

Matthew 6:25–34

Jesus's words are so powerful. In just a few paragraphs, He confronts ordinary desires—“Isn't life more than food?” He asked, challenging our propensity to anxiety—“Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying?” (v. 27). He then addressed our priorities: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (v. 33).

What would it look like if you and I took Jesus at His word? What if we gave up the waste of worrying about things we can't control? What if trusting God and seeking His kingdom was our top priority?

Work hard and trust God. Plan well and trust God. Don't worry and trust God. He will provide.

use. ³Why do you look at the splinter in your brother's eye but don't notice the beam of wood in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ and look, there's a beam of wood in your own eye? ⁵Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's eye. ⁶Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them under their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.

Ask, Search, Knock

⁷“Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door^E will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Who among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him. ¹²Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Entering the Kingdom

¹³“Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads

^A6:18 Other mss add *openly* ^B6:19 Or *valuables* ^C6:27 Or *add a single cubit to his height* ^D6:33 Other mss omit *of God*
^E7:7 Lit *and it*

DAY 153 — INSIGHT FOR THE DAY

We Invest in Our Children

Passage for the Day: Matthew 6:25–33

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be provided for you.”

Matthew 6:33

Under normal circumstances, panel discussions are about as spellbinding to me as watching my bran flakes soak up skim milk. But this one was an exception.

My late wife and I were attending a Christian conference sponsored by one of our favorite ministries. The experts at the dais were advising us about how to invest our capital in such a way as to allow for tax-sheltered security, provide for retirement, and create ways for funds to be available for our progeny and charitable work when we're gone.

One of the men on the panel had lived his whole life in Eastern Europe under communist domination. I was feeling like he was out of place in this session. I had figured that Peter and his family had never been challenged with questions about 401Ks and IRAs. He sat silently at his microphone for the first thirty minutes of the discussion.

Then the moderator asked the inevitable question to this silent participant, “So Peter, what do you think about all of this?”

Peter cleared his throat, nervously sat up straight, and slid the microphone closer. He stared at the audience for just a moment, creating serious uncertainty for everyone. “Well,” he finally said in his deep English-is-my-second-language accent. “We don't have retirement plans where I come from.” He paused. We were frozen in our seats—no one even blinked. Peter slid the microphone even closer.

“We don't have investment plans,” Peter repeated. “We have families.”

Although the session continued for another half hour, I didn't hear any more. I cannot tell you anything anyone said from that moment on. I made no additional notes on my yellow legal pad.

Long before there were stockbrokers and no-load mutual funds, centuries prior to retirement plans and investment counselors, men and women had *children*. They raised these children with lavish love and unwavering discipline. The children grew up and their parents grew old. When Dad and Mom got so feeble that they could no longer support themselves, the family took over. So much mutual respect had been poured into this setting that no one even noticed that taking care of these elderly parents was hard work. “After all,” the children would say, “They cared for *us* when we couldn't care for ourselves.”

“I wonder what it would do to families everywhere,” I said to my wife later that day, “if parents knew that in their old age they would be completely dependent on their children. How differently would we treat our responsibility in raising them if we knew that they'd use these learned skills to care for us when we were unable to care for ourselves?”

I came home from the conference a bit of a different dad. Of course, I didn't fire my financial adviser or cash in my portfolio, but I did look in a new way at the investment I was making in my children. *What if, I remember thinking, my personal long-term security was only a dividend of my investment in my family now? What if I had no other collateral than this?*

I still have no idea why the conference planner put Peter on the stand that day—unless God did it to seriously interrupt my life. Yes, maybe *that* was the reason.