



# **Faithful GOD**

## **COVENANT People**

a Good Soil series for small group study

### **#9: The Teachings of Jesus (I):**

### **Living as God's Covenant People**

**Bible Readings:** **Matthew 5-7 (Sermon on the Mount)**

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES: Faithful God, Covenant People**

This series is taking us on a journey through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, looking at God's purposes in calling human beings into a covenant relationship.

## **PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS**

As you prepare to lead this session, reflect on how you think your group is going. *Have you seen growth in faith, knowledge or enthusiasm in your members? Have you grown closer together as a group?* Take time to thank God for any positive signs you have seen, and remember to find ways to celebrate any successes with the rest of the group. The theme for this session is **the Sermon on the Mount**, as we learn from Jesus what it means to be his disciples in a covenant with God. Although we are picking up on certain selected passages, it is worth reading the whole 'sermon' carefully from **Matthew 5-7**. *In addition to the questions suggested, what questions or reflections could you bring to the group?*

## **PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (before the session)**

In this session, we will be thinking about the teachings of Jesus in what is famously called '**The Sermon on the Mount**'. If you have time, please read through the whole 'sermon' from **Matthew 5-7**. Then focus your mind on the three passages we will be considering in the group:

**Matthew 5:43-48** (on love for enemies); **Matthew 6:1-4** (on giving); **Matthew 7:1-5** (on judging others).

*What do you think of these passages? Are these instructions we try to live by? How hard or easy is it?*

## **STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, Jesus was the perfect example of how we should live our life, and has so richly blessed us with love and joy, with hope in the midst of despair.

Help us to be the salt of the earth. Help us to be the light of the world:

sharing with others that which we have received, boldly proclaiming the good news of your love, finding the seeds of your kingdom within us,

and letting your way grow in our lives and throughout the world.

Give us the strength and wisdom to follow in the footsteps of Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

## **FINDING OUR ROOTS – some questions to explore**

In your group (or perhaps in twos or threes), discuss the following questions, giving time for people to thoughtfully share their responses:

*When you hear the phrase 'the teaching of Jesus' what thoughts spring to mind? Which of his words are most significant to you? What part of the Sermon on the Mount do you find hardest, or easiest?*

*Thinking of the example Jesus gives us, which of his actions are the easiest/hardest to follow?*

## READING THE SCRIPTURES – with background information

**On the Sermon on the Mount:** We might imagine a scene from a biblical movie: that after choosing his twelve disciples, Jesus went up on a mountain and began delivering what is now known as ‘The Sermon on the Mount’ as a single event – to a crowd of people. However, it could also be understood as a collection of teachings and ideas presented by Jesus at different times to his disciples or to different groups (rather than a single, cohesive sermon). It can be seen as Jesus’ interpretation of **the Ten Commandments**, often going above and beyond the rabbinic teaching of the day, in terms of holiness and obedience. The Sermon on the Mount is the cornerstone of Christ’s ethical teaching. It promotes a way of life for God’s Covenant People to embody the love of God. It highlights the moral and spiritual principles of the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ – best understood as the rule of God on earth, or God’s kingdom coming to earth *from* heaven.

As the Ten Commandments were intended to be, Jesus offers a **radical** way of life – encouraging his followers to aim to be better than what society allows or expects – making others take notice, and pointing them to the holy and gracious God in their midst. This session will look at three teachings in particular.

**[Editor’s note:** The word ‘Hell’ appears in English versions of the text (5:21-30). The Greek word actually used is ‘*Gehenna*’, which was an actual location near Jerusalem: the local rubbish heap, where the fires burned continually – the Valley of Hinnom. It was a place with a dark history, cursed by Jeremiah when God’s people descended to a point of idolatrous depravity (Jeremiah 19). It could therefore represent a *warning* – the consequences of turning away from God; the destination of moral decline – rather than a threat of eternal punishment.]

**Read together the first Bible passage: Matthew 5:43-48.** Then read the questions for **PART 1...**

**Then read together the second Bible passage: Matthew 6:1-4,** and then the questions for **PART 2...**

**Then read together the third Bible passage: Matthew 7:1-5,** followed by the questions for **PART 3...**

## DIGGING DEEPER – some questions for you to consider in your group:

### PART 1: LOVING

Jesus encourages us to think about Christian love, going beyond the normal boundaries and expectations. *What is Christian love to you? How does it differ from what we might consider ‘ordinary’ human loving? What does it mean to love our enemies? Is it about a feeling of love, an active or practical love, or an attitude that wishes no harm (and perhaps wants the best for the person despite their actions towards us)? How might God help us to achieve love for ‘enemies’? How can praying for them help?*

### PART 2: GIVING

*In this passage, is Jesus only referring to financial or material giving? What other ways can we give? How easy do you find giving? Is it easier to give some things than others? Are there situations and people we find it hard to be giving towards?*

### PART 3: JUDGING (or not)

*In what ways do we judge others? Have you ever inwardly ‘tutted’ about someone else? Why? Are there circumstances in which we need to judge? If so, how should we do it? Do you see a link between judgement and justice? Where do we learn of Jesus’ passion for justice? Do we need help seeing the ‘logs’ in our own eyes? In a church family, how can we help one another see?*

## PRAYING TOGETHER

Start by reading together the hymn: ‘**Blest are the pure in heart**’ (*Singing the Faith*, 244). Then, have a time of open prayer for the world and the needs of your group or community. Conclude by reading the hymn: ‘**Help us, O Lord, to learn**’ (*Singing the Faith*, 501), and saying **The Lord’s Prayer** together.

## COVENANT LIVING: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE (to think about afterwards)

The teachings of Jesus can be difficult, and sometimes take years to develop in us as habits or ways of thinking. Do not be discouraged! We do it all with God’s help. *What in today’s discussion has struck a chord? Have you been inspired or challenged to consider your own attitude about a situation or person? Is there something you can change for the better, as we try to live as God’s covenant people?*

# Junior Good Soil, issue #9

## JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES - “The Sermon on the Mount”

Written by Andy Murphy.

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Junior Good Soil is for children's and young people's groups in churches.

It can be easily adapted and you can add your own ideas!



### PLANTING THE SEED – what are we thinking about today?

Today, we will be thinking about some of the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus taught his disciples in many ways. Sometimes in stories (parables), sometimes by his miracles or healings, sometimes by how he lived his life, and sometimes he gave them instructions or commandments about how God wants us to live. Matthew's Gospel gives us a long passage of Jesus's instructions, which are known as '**The Sermon on the Mount**' – because Jesus was on a hill when he was speaking. His words help us to understand God's commandments better, but sometimes they seem very hard to do. We should always remember that if we find it hard to obey Jesus' words, if we ask him, he will help us.

We will be looking at 3 parts in particular: **LOVING ENEMIES**, **GIVING** and **NOT-JUDGING**!

### QUIET TIME – a prayer (for use at the start or end of the session)

Dear God, you have called us to be your people, and you are inviting us to be disciples of Jesus. Help us to learn about the way of life he teaches us, and help us to be our very best selves, so that we can shine your light into the world. When we get things wrong, forgive us, we pray, and let us remember that we are always deeply loved by you, just as Jesus showed us. **Amen.**

### TELLING THE STORY – reading the Bible... [Matthew 5:43-48](#), [Matthew 6:1-4](#), [Matthew 7:1-5](#)

For younger children, read about the Sermon on the Mount in the **Usborne Children's Bible**, pages **97-99**. For older children, click below for the links to the **Contemporary English Version (CEV)**:

[LOVING ENEMIES](#)

[GIVING](#)

[NOT-JUDGING](#)

### WATERING AND GERMINATING – what can we learn? / what does it tell us?

**LOVING ENEMIES** When someone hurts us, bullies us, says something unkind, or makes us feel uncomfortable, the first thing we should do is **tell someone** – a trusted adult or a teacher. Jesus doesn't want us to be hurt, or live in fear. But what about when he says "love your enemy"? Well, **love** isn't always a feeling that we *like* someone, but it can be about not being mean to them in return. It could be about choosing to help them when they need help. It could even mean thinking about what might be wrong in their lives, and praying for them. You don't need to be their best friends or do what they want. But you could ask God's help to find ways to show God's love or kindness to even the most un-lovely people you know.

**GIVING** We all love to receive nice things, but it can be an even bigger blessing to give! Jesus says we'll find it most rewarding if we give gifts secretly without making a big fuss or letting everyone know. Giving or raising money for charities can also be very rewarding – but try to make it not all about you!

**NOT JUDGING** It's very easy to judge other people, or to 'condemn' them (think badly of them), even before we know anything about them. Jesus says we should first take a good look at our own lives, before we judge other people. We don't know what they might be going through, or what makes them behave the way they do, but we can look at our own faults and try to fix those first, before we think badly of others.

### LETTING IT GROW – ideas for activities and discussion

Ask the children which of these three things they find hardest and why. Discuss examples together. Plan a **surprise gift** to give a blessing to a person (or more than one) without them knowing who it's from!

### PRAISE AND WORSHIP – hymns and songs (can be used at the start or end, or whenever!)

**What songs or hymns have the children really enjoyed? Sing some of their favourites!**