



**Love:** How do these devotions teach about the love of God and the love for one another?

**Learn:** What have you learned about where Jesus walked that helps you with where you walk?

**Share:** What key insights have you learned this week on how to share your faith with others?

**Serve:** Look at the prayer list. Who can you pray for? Who needs a little extra help in an area where you can make a difference?

**Healing Strength:** Bucky Jordan (Tim's Dad), Rex Townsend, Chris Osborn (Ken and Sandy daughter), Janet Coons (Donna's daughter)

**Homebound Members:** Mary Hicks, Mary Schmidt, Joann Young, Jeanne Carman

**Military Personnel:** Adam Walters, Joseph Roberts, Lucas Lamkin, Adam Clark

**MONDAY 2.29.16 Matthew 5:1-6** Jesus did not just preach the Sermon on the Mount once, and then move on to other topics. William Barclay noted that the verb translated "taught" describes "repeated and habitual action, and the translation should be: 'This is what he used to teach them.'" This sermon's principles have been called the platform, the foundation of all that Jesus taught about God's Kingdom and those who are its citizens. The *Common English Bible* renders verses 3-11 as "happy are," not the more familiar "blessed are." Jesus would have used the Aramaic phrase "O, the blessedness of ...". Scholar N. T. Wright has said, "In our world, still, most people think wonderful news consists of success, wealth, long life, victory in battle. Jesus is offering wonderful news for the humble, the poor, the mourners, the peacemakers." Which of Jesus' statements ring most true for you? Of which do you feel, "I sure wish I had some of that"?

**TUESDAY 3.1.16 Matthew 5:17-42** In today's reading, Jesus quoted five different snippets of Old Testament law. In each case, he echoed the Old Testament prophets by saying God didn't want just outward compliance. God cares about the inner spirit behind our acts (see Isaiah 1:10-15; Jeremiah 6:20; Amos 5:21-24). That's why Jesus said he hadn't come to "do away with" the law. He wanted to apply it to the true source of both good and bad in life: our (often hidden) inner self. Jesus, like many Hebrew teachers, used hyperbole—rhetorical exaggeration to grab attention and underline a point's seriousness. So "tear out your eye ... chop off your hand" says, "Temptation is serious business. Don't play with it in your mind, but avoid it." What insights do you get about the basic life principle Jesus wants you to take seriously, and about your own inner attitudes and motives?

**WEDNESDAY 3.2.16 Matthew 5:43-6:18** "Don't blow your trumpet" is another use of hyperbole. Many charity boxes were trumpet-shaped, which may explain Jesus' image. Many Hebrew rabbis also stressed the need for pure motives behind good deeds—but that was hard to live. It still is. Scholar Myron Augsberger notes that today "one-upmanship, competition for bigness, assurances that God blesses the faithful with material bonanzas or with health and healing" tempt many of us. Verses 2, 5 and 16 used a business word that literally meant "payment in full." Jesus said showy piety does often produce human admiration and praise—but that's all it brings us. If the choice is between human praise here and now, or God's appreciation in eternity, which (if you're really honest with yourself) does your heart prefer?

**THURSDAY 2.3.16 Matthew 6:19-34** Understanding Jesus' use of hyperbole can serve us well in applying this section's principles. Taken as fully literal, they would seem to say that any saving, any planning for the future on this earth, is wrong and shows a lack of trust in God. Jesus' point was that, in the end, this world is not the most important reality. True wisdom values God's gift of an eternal life of joy and freedom over this life's transient treasures. Scholar Craig Keener notes that "most people in antiquity had little beyond basic necessities—food, clothing and shelter." Most of us live well above that subsistence level. Sadly, it often seems that our stress level rises in proportion to the additional resources we have. In what practical ways can you apply Jesus' teaching to "stop worrying about tomorrow" (verse 34) to your attitudes and practices?

**FRIDAY 2.4.16 Matthew 7:1-14** In today's passage, Jesus taught some crucial relationship principles. Since "all have sinned and fall short of God's glory" (Romans 3:23), we need to take responsibility for our own life, rather than spending our energy judging or condemning others. Jesus also told the disciples to "ask," "search," and "knock"—in other words, to pray. Deepening our relationship with God through constant communication and trusting that God has our best interests at heart is key. Taking responsibility for our own thoughts, emotions, words, and actions instead of pointing the finger of blame can be difficult. Yet healthy, authentic, loving relationships depend on our ability to "take the log out of our own eye." What is your "log"? What are the issues that keep you from living as Jesus taught us? How can you more fully reflect God's grace to you in the way you relate to others?

**SATURDAY 2.5.16 Matthew 7:15-29** Jesus didn't offer quick, slick surface change. He was concerned about the deep roots from which life springs, about whether we build our lives on solid rock or shifting sand. Like prophets before him, he warned about false prophets (Jer. 6:14; Ez. 22:28). They challenged Jesus' followers, too. But Jesus' main concern was not for us to play "gotcha," and live with contempt for others' weaknesses (remember Matthew 7:1-5). He asked us to focus on the foundation for our life, and the kind of fruit we bear. Jesus said, "Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them in to practice is like a wise builder" (verse 24). What paths to greater freedom and joy have you seen offered to you as you've read Jesus' sermon this week? How can your life, and your impact on the lives of others, be stronger and better as you open your heart to the inner transformation, the new way of seeing life, that Jesus offers you?