

Winfree Church's
If My People Will Pray... Prayer Ministry Presents



LIVING OUT THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 21, 2025

SHARE CHRIST  SERVE OTHERS

PREFACE

Prayer. What an amazing, incredible gift we have been given. God has given to the world His Son. To believers, He has given the Holy Spirit. And for direct contact with Him, unimpeded, always available, He has invited us into communion with conversation. With Him. Anytime. All the time. **What a gift!** But do we take advantage of God's generosity? As individuals? As a church body?

In July 2024, we embarked on a journey, guided by the Holy Spirit, to renew and revitalize our Prayer Ministry. We named our Prayer Ministry: **"If My People Will Pray..."** taken from **2 Chronicles 7:14**. We began with the corporate prayer initiative called "Twenty-One Days of Prayer" in September. We prayed that Winfree Church would always gather intentionally in prayer. We asked for unity in our mission to **Share Christ and Serve Others**. We expressed gratitude to God for the legacy of Winfree's faithful service. We sought specific guidance during a transitional period following Pastor Benjamin's retirement, praying for our Transition Team and Pastor Search Committee to be led by the Holy Spirit.

We were encouraged by the participation in "21 Days," as it served as a model to continue our individual and congregational efforts to pray for Winfree's life and to collectively seek God's will in our path forward. We continued with prayer-focused devotional guides for Advent and Lent. Dr. Clingenpeel blessed us with a series of sermons based on the Winfree Covenant, reminding us to be unified in heart and mind as we strive to become more like Jesus each day. In May of this year, we participated in the global event, **Thy Kingdom Come**, which focused our attention on how we might pray, as Jesus taught His disciples to pray.

As we reflect on these past experiences, we look forward to our next Twenty-One Days of Prayer, beginning in September 2025. It is truly an exciting time for our church as we welcome and embrace a new senior shepherd and take our next steps forward. It is a time of transition and transformation. But isn't living a transforming life something Jesus call us all to experience? Individually? As a congregation? Transformed to become a different people, living by Kingdom of God ways.

Living Out the Sermon on the Mount will be the theme and focus of our upcoming Twenty-One Days of Prayer. In Jesus' first discourse, as recorded in **Matthew 5-7**, He teaches His disciples—and us—that seeking the Kingdom of God requires a perspective unlike anything previously taught. It is a counter-cultural series of lessons designed to reveal God's will for us on earth. **"Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven."** It was delivered at a pivotal moment in humanity's spiritual journey, marking a shift from the Old Covenant ways of the Law and the Prophets to the New Covenant message of Faith and Grace embodied in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Jesus described a challenging journey for anyone who chooses to follow Him, but the rewards include living a better life—one of abundance and eternal salvation. The challenge and the promise are available to us today.

We thank God for His faithfulness in answering our prayers over the past year. We invite and encourage you to join us as we embark on this 21-day journey. We invite you to engage fully and see the transition and transformation that God can make in your life and the life of our congregation when you and I seek to live out Kingdom ways.

May God bless your journey, and may you sense His presence as you go to Him in prayer.

Pastor Steve Mapp

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DAY ONE

GOD'S KINGDOM ON EARTH

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. — Matthew 5:1-2

Meditation—The main message from the Sermon on the Mount is about spiritual transformation. Like an outstanding classical concert, Jesus' teaching hits many notes that can move and motivate us to different depths of experience. Still, we must not miss His desire to show how God the Father wants His Will to be done on earth so that humans can enjoy a thriving life, similar to the joy of experiencing an outstanding concert. Daily devotionals don't give enough time to fully appreciate every note from the Sermon on the Mount, which is essential for understanding its full importance. Therefore, listen carefully to Jesus' teachings to grasp the transformational impact of each specific point and how it guides us to live like Christ.

His sermon outlines God's blueprint for living in His Kingdom on earth, pushing back darkness and allowing light to reveal His way. In His message, Jesus shared experiences that can transform our lives according to God's Will: grace, love, conviction, repentance, faith, sanctification, servanthood, and persecution. Jesus' focus is not on the reward of

eternal life with God in Heaven; His purpose was to teach and model how to live our lives on earth as God intended, following The Way to save us from the transactional nature of human cultures and to guide us toward righteousness by living in concert with God's transformative plan.

Jesus reminded His disciples that seeking and following God's will is our purpose both on earth and in heaven. This transformative journey begins with the understanding that we are utterly dependent on God. Our hearts cannot be full to the brim with earthly pleasures from culturally driven transactions. We must leave a vacant hole in our hearts for God's Word to work and fill to overflowing.

His teachings inspired them, likely leaving some confused about spiritual transformation, filled with wonder, and eager to follow Him. He taught for days, and those who listened were moved to follow. Some obeyed and followed, while others failed to understand His message. May we embrace His teachings and strive to embody God's values in our daily lives.

Reflection

How does it matter how you live your life on earth?

Is there a difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven?

How does the practice of prayer transform your life?

Pray

Father Creator, reveal your purpose
for my life so that Your Will
transforms me to align my living
with Your kingdom principles and
values, drawing me closer to Jesus
with a hunger and thirst to share
His teachings with everyone.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

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

— Matthew 5:3

Meditation—Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount with eight observations of human experiences, known as the Beatitudes, from the Latin word “*beatus*,” meaning “*happy*” or “*flourishing*.” Rather than outlining habits for being worthy citizens in God’s Kingdom, He highlighted life circumstances that bring joy to God in Heaven. It’s as if He was saying, “Congratulations! That’s the way!” when our hearts align with our actions. A prolific devotional author, Oswald Chambers, explains Jesus’ purpose this way: “*The Sermon on the Mount is a statement of the life we will live when the Holy Spirit is getting his way with us.*” Highlight and earmark that quote to return to it often during the next 20 days of prayer.

Our spiritual poverty can stem from trying to overcome material scarcity through economic metrics. Jesus challenged this view, urging His followers to let go of self-reliance, pride, and independence, and instead embrace humility.

To experience transformation in righteousness with God, we must empty our hearts of sin so they can be filled with God’s mercy, forgiveness, love, and grace.

Romans 12:2 reminds us to avoid being shaped by worldly desires and to be transformed by Jesus’ teachings, which always align with God’s perfect will.

The Kingdom of Heaven is the ultimate destination on a lifelong journey along God’s illuminated path to righteousness. Jesus called His disciples to follow His words and replicate and reflect His actions in a spiritual journey to be filled with God’s Holy Spirit, guiding every step.

As we think about our human journey, let us ask, “Am I poor in spirit?” Can we humbly turn to God and find comfort in recognizing our weaknesses that are made strong through Jesus? Can we find purpose and joy in fully trusting the Trinity: God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit?

Reflection

Do you start every new day with a bowl of Cheerios or a prayer to the Creator and Sustainer of Life? Do you find screen time with TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook as fulfilling as meditating on God's truths from the Bible? When was the last time that you shared with anyone how you find joy and peace during challenging events in your life? Is God always present in your heart and mind?

Pray

Father God, I acknowledge that I am spiritually impoverished without You. You alone love me unconditionally and grant me mercy and grace by the gift of Jesus Christ. Humble me to make me dependent upon you in every aspect of life. May the design and purpose of your Kingdom be reflected in my heart, mind, and actions every day of my life on earth.

DAY THREE

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

— Matthew 5:4

Meditation—We often wrestle with why bad things happen to good people. Mourning is a human practice of pouring out the grief we feel in our hearts when life events surprise us in unexpected and shocking ways. Who comforts those who mourn?

Ponder this insight from Reverend NT Wright: “*When God turns the world the right way up, declares Jesus, then those who presently have nothing but grief in their hearts will find comfort, not simply because someone has come alongside them but because the world will be put to rights at last. And when that happens, death itself, the great bringer of mourning, will be overthrown.*”

God, in His endless love, comforts the brokenhearted with compassionate acts that we often miss through our tears. He gives strength and hope to help us carry our heavy burdens. During these challenging times, we should pray and trust Him, even when we find it hard to understand why

suffering happens to those we see as innocent or helpless.

Where does the “happiness” or “flourishing” come from for those who mourn? It comes from God, who offers us comfort and peace when we open our hearts to His gift. We cannot hold bitterness toward God or others if we seek healing and hope from His love.

Jesus understood this. He did not try to dismiss unmerited pain and suffering. Instead, He offers to take our pain upon Himself so that hope and healing can grow in our lives. Jesus obeyed His Father by addressing the root problem of pain and suffering—our sin—by carrying it to His cross, where He agonized because of our hopeless condition, to show God’s power to erase every memory of our sins and give us a new life rooted in righteousness.

We may not deserve this grace, but we must accept God’s will, not for a reward, but because our Father in Heaven knows what is best for us.

Reflection

Who do you mourn for?

Do you feel compassion for persecuted Christians in countries considered enemies of the USA?

Do you try to suppress your emotional reactions to devastating losses?

Using one of your five senses, can you imagine and describe the feeling of experiencing God's comfort and peace?

Pray

Father God, empty our hearts of our sins and brokenness so we can mourn like Jesus and be filled with Your righteousness.

DAY FOUR

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

— **Matthew 5:5**

Meditation—In many cultures, bullies target the meek, who are often undervalued. American culture, in particular, celebrates competitive behaviors that emphasize power and pride, promoting dominance over servant leadership like that of Jesus. By ministering to marginalized individuals, Jesus highlighted the value of meekness and challenged traditional views of God's Kingdom.

Meekness is often mistaken for weakness, but it is the restraint of strength for the benefit of others. Meek individuals powerfully demonstrate gentleness, humility, and patience. They handle conflicts and challenges with a humble attitude, trusting in God's guidance and sovereignty in all situations.

Embracing meekness allows us to receive God's grace and love. It guides us toward peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation, even during difficult times. Meekness doesn't mean being a doormat; it makes room for God's judgment and justice to come through.

The meek reflect the character of Jesus. In **Matthew 11:29**, Jesus extends an invitation to everyone, describing what it means to be meek: *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart."* What an unexpected statement from the King of Kings. God does not call for military responses to solve deep spiritual issues. He calls His humble servants to love enough to lighten an oppressive load. Ponder how we can learn to be meek servants of God?

Let's pray about choosing to walk the path of meekness, a path that leads to experiencing God's Kingdom here on earth. As we journey, may we take every opportunity to testify to the transforming power of Christ in us. May His love, peace, humility, and gentleness take deep root in our hearts.

Reflection

Do you see yourself or others as meek?

Has our culture hardened your heart to the point where you feel you have to win to participate regularly?

Well known Atlanta Pastor Andy Stanley once described the Christian life with this phrase: *"Not in it to win it!"* How do you respond to his statement about the countercultural nature of a Christian life? Do you quietly embrace leading as a servant of Christ without hoping for recognition?

Pray

Holy Father, I come to you often feeling the cultural pressure to be more. Cultural pressure to be more, achieve more, do more – more, more, more – leaves me anxious about what tomorrow will bring. Help me accept Jesus' invitation to learn from him to be humble and walk the path of meekness to change my direction. Lead me to your path of righteousness so that I might be transformed into the wholeness You desire.

DAY FIVE

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

— Matthew 5:6

Meditation—What is righteousness? It is being in the right relationship with God, often described as living according to His will. Where does the desire for righteousness start? First, we must recognize our spiritual poverty. Our sinful nature impoverishes our spiritual growth. We are lacking something essential. Second, we need to acknowledge God's mercy, grace, and unconditional love for us. ***"He guides me in the paths of righteousness for the sake of His name."* –Psalm 23:3.** We can find what we are lacking, what we know God has, but we fail to pray for mercy, grace, and unconditional love for everyone. Third, our trust in God and faith in Jesus Christ offer us righteousness, even though our actions do not earn it. God gives us the free will to follow His path or that of human cultures. Too often, we choose to follow human cultures rather than God's ideal.

On our Christian journey, how do we fill our cup with righteousness?

We seek to understand God's Will by studying the Bible. In John's Gospel, we hear the vivid imagery of Jesus as God's Word. Through His teachings, how He treats everyone, and His miracles, Jesus demonstrated God's Will on earth as it is in heaven. Significantly, Jesus' heart consistently aligned with His words and actions, even to His death on the cross as an innocent man under the law.

However, knowing what God has revealed to humanity as His righteous path for living, we need a transformational change of heart. Jesus' final command to His disciples holds the key, i.e., love as God loves us. Love overcomes and conquers evil. We strongly desire to be loved by others, but we sometimes fail to demonstrate God's love in our relationships. May we find fulfillment and satisfaction in loving to be missional to ***Share Christ... Serve Others.***

Reflection

Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? Is there anything missing from your Christian journey that would fulfill and satisfy your desire for righteousness?

How are we made “perfectly righteous” in God’s view?

Are we keeping the secret of The Way inside our church to fill our cups instead of sharing it with those who do not know the Good News of Jesus Christ?

Pray

Father God, may Your will be done with humanity being “set right” by Your grace and love given for us by Your Son, Jesus Christ.

DAY SIX

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

— Matthew 5:7

Meditation—Imagine how unusual it was for His disciples to hear a call for mercy in a culture that practiced retribution with “*an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.*” Retribution was the norm of the time. Over thousands of years, has retribution or mercy been the standard for leaders worldwide? Do we need more retribution or mercy to experience God’s Kingdom on earth? Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount continued to challenge cultural traditions.

When we feel deeply wronged, our initial emotional response might be anger seeking retribution. Is there another way? Consider the response of a survivor to the 2015 mass shooting during a Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC. The horror of that event was followed by intense grief and mourning. Dylan Roof, the shooter and an attendee at the Bible study, was reported to have said, “*Y’all want something to pray about? I’ll give you some to pray about.*” Then

the murders took place. “*You took something really precious from me. I will never talk to her again,*” said the daughter of 70-year-old Ethel Lance, one of the nine people killed in Wednesday’s massacre. “*But I forgive you and have mercy on your soul. You hurt me. You hurt a lot of people. But God forgives you. I forgive you.*” Felecia Sanders, the mother of the youngest victim, reportedly told Roof, “*We welcomed you Wednesday night in our Bible study with open arms. You have killed some of the most beautiful people that I know,*” she said in court. “*As we said in the Bible study, we enjoyed you, but may God have mercy on you.*” When we show mercy, we reflect God’s mercy for us as sinners in a lost world.

How does receiving mercy make you feel? Do you experience kindness, forgiveness, compassion, or love? If you’ve felt one of these emotions, how do you feel when you show mercy? Do you expect anything other than deep gratitude?

Reflection

Are we known for showing mercy at Winfree Church?

Do we practice forgiveness, grace, and compassion?

Do we see “mercy” as transformative when received or given?

Do we desire mercy more than retribution? Showing mercy also brings healing, reconciliation, and transformation, bringing us closer to God.

Pray

Father God, make us merciful to others through Your Holy Spirit. Soften our hearts and grant us grace to forgive, show compassion, and reconcile with those who have hurt us as You transform us in righteousness.

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

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

— **Matthew 5:8**

Meditation—From Father Abraham’s era through the times of Kings, Judges, and Prophets, Israelites adhered to Mosaic Law as interpreted by Jewish Priests. Jesus challenged the holiness of Priests and Rabbis, particularly whether their minds and hearts truly aligned with God’s Kingdom as a measure of holiness, concerning his message about being “*pure in heart*.”

Reflect on the five principles of being “pure in heart.”

1.

“Purity” is not the same as “perfection.” In practice, we often see purity as being close to, but not entirely free of, blemishes or impurities.

2.

“Pure in heart” relates to inner morality rather than just following rules. When we respond morally, we practice “do unto others as you want them to do to you”.

3.

Purity of heart involves sincerity of purpose and integrity of intent; duplicity, hypocrisy, and deceit seek to corrupt a pure heart.

4.

There is a desire for spiritual cleansing in the concept of “pure in heart.” Recall the soulful plea of **Psalms 51:10** – “*God, create a pure heart in me. Give me a new spirit that is faithful to you.*” That was Jesus’ call to the crowd on this occasion, and He modeled “a pure heart” for all ages to know the standard for being pure in heart according to God’s will.

5.

There is a promise for those with a “pure heart” to see God. God recognized that humans could not overcome the grip of sin. He sent Jesus to bridge the gap that keeps us from being “pure in heart.” Jesus sanctifies His followers based on our faith in His perfect life through the ransom paid for our sins.

Reflection

Are you pure in heart? Can you be pure in heart without being perfect?

Are there areas of our lives that need to be surrendered to God for His cleansing?

What daily practices can help you develop a pure heart?

What motivates you to seek purity of heart when our culture values other things?

Pray

Holy God, the words from Psalms reflect my petition: create a pure heart in me, and give me a new spirit that is more faithful to You and the nature of Your Kingdom in Heaven.

DAY EIGHT

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

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

— Matthew 5:9

Meditation—Humans cannot escape conflict. Our natural tendency to resolve conflict is to either take great satisfaction in winning or to withdraw completely from disagreements that cause conflicts. In the context of Jesus' messages on how God views our human behavior, might we consider that the unexpected but desired resolution to conflict is simply living together according to God's Will, not our own? If we do accept God's Will as our own, then being called sons (and daughters) of God makes sense.

Being a peacemaker means more than just avoiding conflict or stepping in during a physical fight. Peacemaking involves actively working toward reconciliation (see Day 12 Devotional, **Matthew 5:23-24**), fostering harmony, seeking unity of hearts and minds, and caring for others' well-being. It is deeply rooted in love, empathy, and unity. We need to engage in healthy, respectful discussions about important issues without letting primal emotions override our reason so that we can model God's peace to others.

How can we demonstrate God's peace to others? As Christians, we are called to be disciples who speak and act by God's Will. As recipients of God's grace and peace, we are encouraged to share that grace and peace with others, becoming His instruments of reconciliation in a broken world. Peacemaking is often easier said than done; it usually begins with seeking and offering forgiveness while trying to understand other perspectives. Our pursuit of justice in reconciliation must be guided by God's commands rather than our impulses, which may not fully align with His intent. We must remember that Jesus gave us a new command: to love God first, and then extend that love to others, even those with whom we may differ.

Let us embrace the divine work of peacemaking on earth. We might not be able to bring peace to the Middle East, but we can commit ourselves to peacemaking efforts at home, in our church, and within our communities.

Reflection

Are you a peacemaker? Is there a need for reconciliation in your life today?

Do you actively seek peace and reconciliation within your family, your church community, your neighbors, and your coworkers?

Do you look for opportunities to find common ground instead of focusing on controversial topics that tend to divide us?

Is a peacemaker always motivated by the desire to win an argument?

Pray

Peacemaking Father, continue to guide us on how to bring your peace to everyone. Make us instruments of your transforming power to forgive and accept forgiveness, to reconcile our differences, and to pursue unity in line with Your divine Will rather than our self-righteousness.

DAY NINE

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

— **Matthew 5:10-12**

This may be the most difficult beatitude to grasp. Who wants to be persecuted for one's faith? Worldwide, it is estimated that 1 in 7 Christians are persecuted. The Open Doors watchlist for last year gave the top ten sites in the world for Christian persecution:

1. North Korea
2. Somalia
3. Libya
4. Eritrea
5. Yemen
6. Nigeria
7. Pakistan
8. Sudan
9. Iran
10. Afghanistan

Many believe that Roman persecution of Christians was probably the worst inhumanity has ever known. Yet, Jesus reframed persecution as an indication of genuine faith and a source of blessing.

Genuine faith starts when we stand firm in a belief—firm when our belief

is based upon God's truth. God's truth is rock solid, never faltering, never changing. Cultures throughout the world evolve, sometimes striving to be better than metrics accepted by previous cultures. Faith in God calls us to respond to His standard in absolute terms, not relative to the beliefs of others.

Where is this blessing? The blessing comes from each Christian's earthly journey, modeled after Jesus' life. Jesus told his disciples (**Matthew 16:24**), "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*" How do we respond? Do we ignore this command? Or do we rely on Jesus' strength, grace, and comfort to face opposition and persecution for the sake of righteousness, sharing in part with the suffering that Jesus experienced even at the hands of His own people? Where does the journey end? In the Kingdom of Heaven, where God's Will is always perfectly done.

Reflection

Winfree's Elizabeth Rapp spent two years in North Africa engaging young adults in conversations about the purpose of life within Muslim countries where it is against their law to proclaim any truth other than from the Muslim god, Allah.

Are we not all called to share Christ, even in the face of possible persecution and punishment?

Are we sharing Christ individually and collectively as we should?

Pray

Abba Father, encourage us to be faithful witnesses of Christ. Give us the strength to be Your light in the corners of our world where we feel and experience opposing voices. May we be encouraged by the amazing work Your Spirit can do in this world when we stand firm. May our actions reflect the Light of the World from our hearts to those who fear persecution for their faith. May Your Holy Spirit guide us in revealing the unshakable truth of Your promises to those who place their trust in Jesus.

DAY TEN

SALT AND LIGHT OF THE WORLD

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

— Matthew 5:13-16

Meditation—Jesus’ disciples could readily understand this metaphor about “salt and light”. Salt was highly valued in the ancient world. Greeks considered salt divine. Roman soldiers were paid their wages in salt. **Leviticus 2:13** instructed the Hebrews about salt and their offerings to God: “Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings.” Salt is a preservative; it delays the decay of organic matter. I believe Jesus was asserting that His disciples were to serve as “preservatives”, preserving His teachings, God’s Holy Word, and helping prevent the moral decay of their culture and religion.

Two thousand years after Jesus warned us about losing our savor or hiding our light (**Matthew 5:13-16**), we are seeing how immigrant relocation

influences ingrained culture. When a foreign group brings their cultural norms to an established society, their different values and beliefs can cause conflict. To reduce this tension, the smaller group usually responds in one of two predictable ways. They will either compromise their beliefs and adopt the mainstream culture, or they will retreat into their own community. This way, they can hold onto their beliefs while avoiding conflict, since outsiders won’t know their true beliefs.

In other words, small groups tend to either lose their “saltiness” or hide their light “under a bushel.” As followers of Jesus Christ, Jesus reminded all of His disciples that they “are” salt and light in the world, not that they “may be” or “will become.” Wherever we are planted, we, members of Winfree Church, are called to **Share Jesus... Serve Others.**

Reflection

How is God calling you to be salt and light in the world?

Will you pray for new opportunities for Winfree to welcome and assimilate new people with cultural differences into Midlothian in the name of Jesus Christ?

Pray

Father God, open our hearts to shine the light of Jesus into every dark corner of our community, our Commonwealth, our country, and throughout the world. May salt and light bring Your healing powers to transform our broken cultures.

FULFILLING THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore, anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.* — Matthew 5:17-20**

Meditation—Jesus conveyed good news to the Hebrew people in this passage, referencing the Law and the Prophets from the Old Testament. How might anyone interpret Jesus’ words when He said: ***“I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”***? Do you recognize the significance of the messages from the Sermon on the Mount in spiritual revelation and development? Jesus’ first sermon was a bridge between the era of the “Law and the Prophets” and the newly revealed era of “Faith by Grace” He represented. The purpose of Old Covenant scriptures was to demonstrate God’s plan for His Kingdom (called the Day of the Lord in OT) to be perfectly fulfilled by the Messiah under a New Covenant. Jesus, in Word, heart, and deeds, was the perfect embodiment of the new command to love God first and others as our neighbors (New Covenant).

Jesus knew that the Hebrews looked to the scribes and Pharisees for spiritual guidance to succeed in life. However, He understood that many of these religious

scholars only appeared righteous on the outside; they could preach and teach righteousness that did not genuinely reflect their hearts. Imagine the shock factor of what Jesus was saying to the disciples and the crowd. That your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees! What was it that the religious leaders of that day were missing? Where did they fall short? They knew the Law and its precepts. But they completely lacked the heart and spirit of God’s Law.

Therefore, Jesus called His followers to a higher standard—one that requires aligning their hearts with their words and actions in everyday life. Jesus requires that we see others and see the Law with the eyes of the heart. With compassion. To love unconditionally. Jesus exemplifies a life of abundance and flourishing, perfectly embodying what only God’s Messiah could do. He suffered as a servant to all, even giving His life on the cross for us. Is there any example in the world of greater, unconditional love?

Reflection

Do we see hypocrisy in the church today?

How might we strive to overcome hypocritical behaviors?

Are we willing to follow Jesus' servant model with joy in our hearts?

Are there times when we simply go through the motions?

Do we strive to see others with the eyes of our hearts?

Do our actions and what others see on the outside reflect what is on the inside?

Pray

Heavenly Father, we praise You for the unconditional love flowing from Your heart. Transform my heart so that obedience to Your righteous ways flows from genuine love of You.

DAY TWELVE

POWER OF PEACE

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

— **Matthew 5:23-24**

Historians say humans have experienced peace worldwide for 268 of the past 3,400 years. They define “peace” as the absence of active conflict that has caused more than 1,000 deaths. Is that truly peace? Can peace exist when people on both sides of a conflict keep fighting? Why is it so hard to achieve long-lasting peace in the world?

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples three essential steps for finding peace:

1. Remember what might have caused a conflict with others.
2. Forgive those who have wronged you.
3. Reconcile with those you forgive. Bitterness toward someone can prevent you from recalling the circumstances and causes of a conflict.

Together, bitterness, stubbornness, and self-righteousness can block forgiveness. Without forgiveness, reconciliation cannot happen. We sometimes confuse negotiations where one party is required to give up something essential in order to reconcile. This is the flawed path of humanity.

Jesus was teaching about a deeper reconciliation, aligning one’s spirit with God’s. Without reconciliation, there is no peace. Peace comes from God and is given by Him. God wants humans to live rightly, and through this, we can show our love for each other.

Godly relationships grow through love and flourish in peace. If we love God and want to offer sacrifices at the altar because of our love for Him, Jesus instructs His followers to leave their gifts at the altar and reconcile for peace before returning to God’s altar with sacrificial offerings. The pursuit of peace among people is essential to God’s plan for us to become more righteous by living in harmony with others.

Reflection

How can we serve as instruments of God's peace through Winfree Church?

How would embracing peacemaking help Winfree Church fulfill our mission to

Share Christ... Serve Others?

Can we take on the challenge of working toward peace in our Midlothian

community, in the Commonwealth, across the USA, and around the world?

Pray

Heavenly Father, make us instruments of Your Peace in the world. Remind and guide us, through your Holy Spirit, to focus on Jesus' teachings and actions that lead to lasting peace on earth. Help us confront conflict in spiritually healthy ways so we can give God the credit for His righteous path into the future.

DAY THIRTEEN

PURSuing PURITY IN HEART AND MIND

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

— Matthew 5:27-30

Meditation—Impurities in metals are removed through intense fire. High temperatures over long periods are known to eliminate impurities. Our hearts can be corrupted by sin, causing them to become hard like metal. Jesus elevated the meaning of one of the Ten Commandments in this part of the Sermon on the Mount. While Jesus seems to emphasize one commandment, his true intention is for us to honestly examine our hearts for any areas of impurity and take action to eliminate or avoid the temptations within. However, as sinners, we must take responsibility. Paul reminds us that even though we are saved by grace, we do not have permission to keep breaking the Law. We are accountable.

Jesus described horrific remedies to cleanse our hearts of sin. You may ask, “Lord, is there not another way?” Paul provided an answer to this question in his letter to the Romans.

The commandments, do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not covet; and any other commandment, are summed up by this commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself. – Romans 13:9

Our gracious God provided an alternative way to attain purity of heart and mind through His gift of Jesus in human form. Jesus taught about God’s righteousness. Jesus exemplified God’s righteousness. Jesus is righteous - God’s unconditional and redemptive love shown to humanity in a humble being like no other.

Jesus' first sermon touched the hearts and minds of those listening by sharing some candid truths. Sin is so sneaky and widespread in the world that our desire and efforts to be righteous like Jesus often seem impossible. God knew there would be a need for a Messiah—a Savior and Lord—long before Mary first held Jesus in her arms. Jesus, from His human experience, understood that humanity was failing in its attempts to follow God's Law, as given to Moses, and the additional rules from the Pharisees. At another time, with His disciples, Jesus gave His followers a new commandment.

He said to him, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."* – **Matthew 22:37-39**

Perfection is not the goal in life; obedience to Jesus' command is.

Reflection

Will we remain obedient as we journey toward God's righteousness?

Pray

Father God, make in me a new heart obedient to Jesus' greatest, most important commandment.

DAY FOURTEEN

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

— Matthew 5:43-48

“The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people.”

—G.K. Chesterton

Thank you, Reverend Chesterton. Your insight puts Jesus' admonition into perspective and adds a touch of wry humor. Jesus spoke about the rewards from God for loving our enemies, so “that we may be children of the Father”. He also says that loving enemies, even if only to get something in return, is an empty love. Have you ever wondered if someone who can't stand up for any principle in life could offend others sufficiently to have enemies? A common way to make an enemy is through a heated, emotional disagreement over nearly anything. Maybe we should remember this advice from a former pastor: *“Every thought that comes up in your head does not have to come out of your mouth.”* There is loving wisdom in that statement.

In these verses, Jesus helps us begin to understand how God's unconditional love for us keeps calling us back to His path of righteousness. Following Jesus calls us to step into the uncomfortable. Loving all others, especially those who are not like us, is God's way of loving. Though we will never be perfect, don't we take a step in that direction when we obey this call from Jesus?

Jesus concludes this passage by instructing His disciples to “*be perfect.*” Don’t look back now, but didn’t our devotional from yesterday say that we don’t need to be perfect, just obedient? How do we reconcile being perfect like God with the truth that we are not? Here’s the Gospel truth – Jesus is the only human to live a perfect life. He is our standard. But He is more than that; He’s our Savior and Lord. Instead of earning our righteousness by perfecting our deeds, we are declared righteous because of Christ’s actions. The concept of substitutionary atonement is explained in **2 Corinthians 5:21**,

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

We are called to live accordingly because of our faith in Him.

“Never explain—your friends do not need it and your enemies will not believe you anyway.” —**Elbert Hubbard** —enough explaining already; time to reflect.

Reflection

How can we let the Holy Spirit guide us to love our enemies? How do we succeed and fail in the pursuit of perfection?

How many types of perfection are you aware of? Was Jesus talking about “being perfect” as being sinless or as striving to be consistent in loving others?

Pray

Abba Father, mold us and make us into gracious, merciful, and loving individuals, who are made in Your image! Help us obey the call of Jesus to love our enemies as well as our neighbors. To love all others as we ourselves are loved. Help us to step into the uncomfortable with the knowledge that You will go with us.

DAY FIFTEEN

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

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

— Matthew 6:19-24

This quote from NT Wright about “treasure in heaven” provides succinct insight in sufficient words to illuminate Jesus’ meaning in the scripture above:

*When Jesus says ‘You will have treasure in heaven’, he doesn’t mean that the young man must go to heaven to get it; he means that God will keep it stored up for him until the time when, in the Age to Come, all is revealed. The reason you have money in the bank is not so that you can spend it in the bank but so that you can take it out and spend it somewhere else. The reason you have treasure in heaven, God’s storehouse, is so that you can enjoy it in the Age to Come when God brings heaven and earth together at last. And ‘eternal life’, as most translations put it, doesn’t mean ‘life in a timeless, otherworldly dimension’, but ‘the life of the Age to Come’ (the word ‘eternal’ translates a word which means ‘belonging to the Age’). —NT Wright, **Mark for Everyone**, p. 135.*

Holding onto precious feelings for earthly possessions consumes valuable space that could be dedicated to spiritual treasures of eternal value. Jesus highlights this point twice in **Matthew 6:24**. We need some possessions to live on earth. However, when our possessions become too abundant and essential to us, we realize we no longer truly own them; instead, our possessions control us.

What treasures might we find in Heaven? Bart Millard wrote his first hit song ***I Can Only Imagine*** after his father’s death. Bart said: “For several years following his death, I would find myself writing the phrase ‘I can only imagine’ on anything I could find. That simple phrase would give me peace thinking about what my dad was finally experiencing.” The glorious treasure that all will find in Heaven is God’s Will being perfectly revealed in unimaginable ways.

Reflection

How do we recognize objects of worship in our lives that can seek to push God out of our hearts and minds?

What power do we have to control this human tendency?

Pray

Come Lord Jesus, fill our hearts to overflowing love for God. Guard us against our human tendencies to accumulate assets that do not honor and glorify God the Father.

TRUSTING IN GOD'S PROVISION

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can anyone of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

— Matthew 6:25-27

Meditation—May we surrender our false sense of righteousness. Trust in God's provision every day. Worry less; love more. Trust in God ahead of what will happen in the next minute and beyond. Be surprised by how looking back at how God provides only makes sense when viewing through the rearview mirror. *Oh for grace to trust Him more...*

Trusting God. Since Adam and Eve chose to trust the tempting words of a serpent instead of God's, humanity has endured suffering. We know from our own life experiences that this is true. But have you thought lately about how God continues to respond to the rebellion of the first humans? God has persistently pursued people over thousands of years to prove that He alone is trustworthy. He never forces us to trust Him. Instead, He makes it difficult to ignore the remarkable ways He offers grace and unconditional love to a pitiful and ungrateful species of rebels.

Well-respected author Philip Yancey offers this perspective: “God's terrible

insistence on human freedom is so absolute that He granted us the power to live as though He does not exist, to spit in His face, to crucify Him.” Oh, we may respond, that's not me; I'm a Christian. Being a Christian means following Christ. When Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, wearing the label “Christian” was an insulting and uninformed reflection of misguided belief or character. Has our culture changed for the better or worse? Do we claim to seek righteousness but still follow our friends down a different path? Do we fully trust God to provide for our needs, or do we worry about today and tomorrow? If only God has the wisdom to create us from dust, then wouldn't He watch over and care for me every moment of my life?

Recall Paul's message in **2 Cor. 3:5**,

“Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God,”

Reflection

You have likely heard the question, *“How could God let this happen?”* Your answer requires greater reflection than any answer to suggest God’s lack of caring in all circumstances. We will one day lay down this life as we know it. Ponder how you will live your life until that time arrives. Will you trust God to lead, guide, and direct your path in righteousness through every dark valley and from each mountain top?

Pray

Father God, grace, grace... give me grace to trust You more each day.

DAY SEVENTEEN

A HEART OF HUMILITY AND DISCERNMENT

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

— Matthew 7:1-5

Meditation—Don’t you love the wisdom of CS Lewis? Recall two quotes from Lewis that capture Jesus’ strong admonition about human judgment. Ponder these insights:

“Human beings judge one another by their external actions. God judges them by their moral choices.

Don’t judge a man by where he is because you don’t know how far he has come.”

Do you admit that you are judgmental? Of course, you are. Can we confess that we are judgmental? We all are.

Jesus pokes you and me “right in the eye” when he asks, “*Why do you seek to remove the speck in your brother’s eye when you have a plank in your own?*” I wonder what difference it might make in my life if I focused on my own faults, weaknesses, and prejudices before I point out those of others around me. Could we consider this the height of hypocrisy?

You’ve chosen each day over the past few weeks to watch a devotional video and/or read the daily devotional in this series on **Living Out the Sermon on the Mount**. Whether consciously or not, you have judged the value of your time and effort invested each time you decide to read a verse of Scripture, meditate on it, consider its meaning in your life, and converse with God about your insights or lack thereof from the experience. Has it been worthwhile? It’s your judgment.

You may have concluded long ago that judgment is necessary to make wise choices in life, even in life-or-death decisions. Jesus expects us to judge. He also instructs us to make wise, sincere judgments about the actions of others, but not before examining our own faults, prejudices, and presumptions. It seems that modern culture has desensitized our individual and collective conscience to hypocrisy in spoken words and behaviors. Acting hypocritically no longer shocks the moral conscience as it once might have. How far have we come? Are we moving in a positive, righteous direction, following Jesus' teachings on humility and discernment? Are our hearts and minds aligned with God's will? These are important questions to reflect on.

Reflection

Do you enjoy constantly being around hypocrites?

Do you judge the words and actions of others harshly? Or do you consider that you might be misunderstanding their statements or stance on a particular issue?

Do you try to understand first before making a judgment about their hypocrisy?

Pray

Father God, give me the acuity of your sight and the willingness to attentively listen before making a judgment with my mind, before I take the time to consult Your heart.

DAY EIGHTEEN

SEEK, ASK, KNOCK

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

— Matthew 7:7-8

Ask. Seek. Find. Knock. Open.

All are actions in an orderly process. It's a general process that humans understand. But how do we react when we follow the process only to find an unexpected and unpleasant outcome? Have you ever followed a cake recipe exactly, only to find that the baked cake sank in the center, filled with a dense, gooey texture? Have you researched how to grow a healthy, weed-free lawn, watched it flourish in the Spring, and then discovered patches of weeds when the heat and humidity of Summer arrive? Have you heard of a successful heart transplant that helped resolve ineffective or insufficient circulation, but noticed that the patient showed no sign of a change of heart?

Have you ever paused to think about how many times you've asked for guidance when faced with choices? I've encountered those crossroads more times than I can count. Have you ever reflected on how often you've sought answers or solutions to life's difficult questions? For me, it's countless. Have you ever considered the times in your life when you wished a door would open, but it never did? Or, on the flip side, when there was

a door, we hesitated to open it because we weren't sure what was on the other side. What do we do in those moments? Where do we turn for help? For answers?

The path to righteousness runs through both the Old and New Covenants. Jesus invites us to pray to God in His Holy Name. We try to know God through His Word, and if we are fortunate—like Saul on the Road to Damascus—we find Jesus. He is the narrow gate we knock on, and when Jesus opens it, He invites us to follow God's Holy Spirit along the path to righteousness, which comes by God's grace. What happens when an event causes our progress on this path to falter? What if parts of the path become overgrown with weeds of sin from our culture? What if we receive the gift of life from modern medical science but fail to change our hearts? We turn to God in humble desperation, pleading for His help. And He always listens. Is our faith strong enough to accept whatever God reveals next? The straight and narrow road to righteousness ends the same for everyone; how we traveled it—by faith, not sight—will determine God's reward at the foot of His throne in His Kingdom of Heaven.

Reflection

Are we, individually and as the Winfree Family of Christ-followers, being faithful in our prayers?

Do we begin our prayers with an open heart and overflowing gratitude for God's grace before we ask for His intervention in matters where He may already be working outside of our sight?

We have just completed a 15-month process of inviting a new senior shepherd to lead our flock. Take a moment to consider the countless prayers and hundreds of hours dedicated to asking and seeking God's candidate over these 15 months. The Holy Spirit encouraged us to knock on that door. A new senior shepherd has been appointed. And once again, the truth of Jesus' words has been proven. Can we say "Amen" to that!

In welcoming a new Shepherd to lead Winfree into a new era, will we renew our commitment to Winfree's mission and covenant to honor the legacy of those who have gone before us to join the Holy Spirit in inviting and showing those who do not know the path to God's righteousness and The Way of Jesus as taught in the Sermon on the Mount?

Pray

Our Father in Heaven, only You are Holy. You are our Creator; we are the clay formed from dust. Shape and form us into vessels to be filled with Your love so that we might pour ourselves out to those who do not yet know that there is a path to righteousness, where You sit at the end to welcome us home.

DAY NINETEEN

THE NARROW PATH TO LIFE

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

— **Matthew 7:13-14**

Meditation—Jesus used metaphors related to everyday experiences. The Hebrew people during Jesus’ time were familiar with gates in the great walls surrounding cities like Jerusalem. We know of eight gates that penetrate Jerusalem’s wall, but none of them are called “the narrow gate.” Within Jerusalem’s walls, the Temple was not just a place to worship God. To the Hebrew people, this was God’s home on earth. Strange as it might be, the walls were intended to protect the Temple and all the people who lived in the great city. The gates controlled traffic – human and animal – in and out of the city to the epicenter of God’s Kingdom (or empire) among humans.

God’s Kingdom is another metaphor. It is about life—everything that creates, sustains, and calls people to true life. It saves us from everything that hinders us from coming alive, threatens our lives, or seeks to destroy us. It’s a life of service, suffering love (agape), compassion, kindness, and joy. And it’s this life, the life of the kingdom, the life of God’s empire, which is the narrow way. But there is also a wide way—the way of the world without God, without Jesus. It is the path to eternal destruction, away from eternal life in the presence of God.

Jesus is the narrow gate; He walks the narrow way. Because his way contradicts the powers of the world, it is a demanding and challenging path—one of persecution, struggle, resistance, and suffering. In **Matthew 22:14**, Jesus acknowledges how challenging and demanding it is to consistently follow the narrow way when He said, *“For many are called but few are chosen.”*

The upside-down meaning of the Beatitudes begins to make sense in the context of a small, narrow gate that leads to a narrow path—the path of God’s righteousness. We should remember that in the “blessing statements,” as well as in the “narrow gate,” Jesus is speaking about Himself. We learn who Jesus is through His teachings, and He embodies what He taught. So when Jesus talks about the narrow gate, He’s really referring to himself.

Jesus is the narrow gate. His life represents God’s Kingdom’s way, the empire’s way, the difficult way, and we are called to enter it. And our journey begins in this life, on this earth, and culminates on the New Earth and Heaven that Jesus will one day rule as Lord and King.

Reflection

Why did Jesus use metaphors and parables in His teaching?

Can metaphors and parables be interpreted to mean different things to different readers?

Do you need to slow down and ponder Scriptures expressed in the literary style of metaphors and parables?

Pray

Heavenly Father, Your ways are greater in scope and mightier in power than we can readily comprehend. Thank you for our guide, Your Holy Spirit, who helps us navigate through life and appreciate the journey.

GENUINE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

— Matthew 7:21-23

Meditation—God created us for relationship – with Him, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and each other. Throughout history, humans have formed groups and built cultural relationships based on family values. Churches have become the home for Christian families.

God established His divine relationships with humans through covenants. You will recall a land covenant made with Abraham’s descendants, the Twelve Tribes of Israel. A significant law covenant was made with God’s chosen people and delivered to them by Moses. There was also a great promise covenant made with Noah’s descendants, signified by the rainbow. Moving from Old Covenants to the New Covenant, God’s Son, Jesus Christ, embodies God’s enduring, unconditional love for humanity—given freely to all people by grace. Humans who humble themselves to seek to know God accept covenants as binding agreements to live in relationship with one another.

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount marked the start of a major spiritual shift from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. The Old Testament covenants required strict discipline to maintain. While God would never break a covenant, history shows that humans often did. Therefore, our Creator

revealed to humans the perfect example of His Righteousness, embodied in Jesus Christ, and expressed through Jesus’ unconditional love, which kept His heart aligned with that of His Father in Heaven.

Winfree Church has a covenant with God and our church family, guided by Him. May our legacy of honoring this covenant with God and one another continue for generations to come. During this transition from our previous pastor to a new one, we remain united and rooted in our faith in God and Jesus Christ. Our Winfree Covenant reminds us of our commitments to the Divine and to our fellow human beings. It describes a sincere, Christ-centered relationship among like-minded people connected by the Divinity of the universe. May we strive to keep our covenant as we move forward, holding onto hope that Jesus’ light will shine through us. May our hearts, captured in the words of our covenant, be the Light of Jesus shining through the cracks in our flawed characters. We welcome our new Senior Pastor, Reverend Lee Foster, to accept and embrace our covenant, becoming our Shepherd to guide us and future generations of Christ-followers in celebrating the peace and joy that come from having faith in and knowing Jesus more deeply.

Reflection

We are together to be God's church. We are not here by chance; rather, God, through His grace, is making us a fellowship to embody and express the very spirit of His Son.

Pray

Lord God, we praise You for pursuing us through the centuries in our unworthiness to be called your children. Thank You for loving us always. Thank You for Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

DAY TWENTY-ONE

KEY LESSONS FROM THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

— Matthew 6:9-13

Meditation—Living out the Sermon on the Mount encourages us to focus on how and what Jesus taught His disciples to pray. First, we must acknowledge that only God is sufficiently righteous to be called Holy when we mention His name. Second, God wants us to understand that His goal is for His Will to be done and fulfilled on earth just as it is in His home – Heaven. Third, God wants us to know that He will provide for our daily needs. Fourth, God desires us to be a forgiving people so that we might fully grasp the deep spiritual meaning of trusting and loving Him. Lastly, we are called to humble ourselves in recognition that our ancestors fell hard for temptation in the perfect garden God created for humanity, and that one day, being delivered from the falsehoods of a tempting serpent, God will renew His loving relationship with us in His garden on a New Earth with a New Heaven revealed above. In our

final, everlasting home, with God in heaven, we will be forever free from the evil one. How blessed will we be in that Age to Come! But for now, we live in the “in-between”—the period between Jesus’ first coming and the day we depart to be with Him.

So, God asks us, “‘How do we choose to live in the “in-between?” Do we want to continue living in spiritual poverty? Or do we want to humble ourselves and petition God, as Jesus taught, for God’s Will to be accomplished in our lives because of our love for Him? Do we want to live for the promise of the Kingdom of Heaven? Or do we want to recognize that God’s Kingdom arrived on earth in the complete and Holy personhood of Jesus Christ, and that we can enjoy an abundant life on earth living in God’s Will because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection to new life for our sake?

Reflection

Have you realized that life in God's Kingdom is meant for us? Is it not better to be poor in spirit than proud and hardened? Is it not better to genuinely feel the brokenness of our culture rather than be angry or suppress your sorrow for our sinful state? Is it not better to restrain our power and channel that energy into growing spiritually according to God's Way in His Kingdom? Is it not better to hunger and thirst for right relationships with God and others than to give in to the pettiness of earthly desires? Is it not better to be "holy" like Jesus than to project an image of righteousness while living with a heart hardened by sin? How will we be recognized as Christians? By our love for God and our neighbors – that's the essence of the New Covenant. Both individually and collectively, may keep our Winfree covenant and our Winfree mission to: **Share Christ... Serve Others.**

Pray

Our Father in Heaven, keep us close to Your heart as Your Holy Spirit leads, guides, and directs our path in righteousness among our fellow humans on earth until the appointed time when our faith in Jesus gives way to the glorious sight of Your Heavenly Home. Amen.

RESOURCES FOR DEEPER EXPLORATION

These devotions are but an appetizer to the complete and rich meal Jesus offered His disciples and followers. As they listened to the Beatitudes, can you hear their private thoughts like “*Why is Jesus asking me to feel so lucky to be unlucky as I am in this world?*”? For those who want to experience and digest a full meal of The Sermon on the Mount, here are some suggested resources.

Professor Jonathan Pennington spent a decade studying the Sermon on the Mount. He published his findings in Jonathan T. Pennington, ***The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary*** (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018). He has posted several videos about the unexpected meaning of Jesus’ first discourse on YouTube.

<https://youtu.be/qCwdmGdklI0>

<https://youtu.be/sXR4JznWBes>

Right Reverend NT Wright’s ***Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church*** is worth carefully reading and pondering, interspersed with many prayers for understanding Rev. Wright’s insights.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5E0BsU5Tmc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRnXmn8X48M>

Philip Yancey’s ***The Jesus I Never Knew*** provides another deeply insightful way to understand the meaning of the Beatitudes and all of the lessons from the Sermon on the Mount.

<https://youtu.be/cpjATFWcihM?si=AYFhk4ELKHlvjmqX>

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