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EVERYTHING IS BACKWARDS

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THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

WEEK 1

EVERYTHING IS BACKWARDS | GROUP DISCUSSION

Jesus' opening words in the Sermon on the Mount paint a picture of a Kingdom that is unlike any we have ever known. His Kingdom doesn't belong to the rich, the powerful, or the influential. His Kingdom belongs to the poor, to the mourning, to the hungry, and to the persecuted. These opening eight Beatitudes remind us that the Kingdom of God is a kingdom for the down-and-out, the broken, and the hurting. In other words, it's a kingdom built for people like us.

Open your discussion by reading Matthew 5:1-16 (The Message translation) aloud as a group. As you've read the passage this week (and just now) what has resonated with you? As you imagine yourself on the hillside, how do you think you would have heard these opening words to the Sermon? What has stuck out to you as you've studied them this week?

QUESTIONS

- As part of your personal reflection this week, you were asked to think of what our culture's version of the Beatitudes might look like. What did you write? Who are the people our world would describe as "blessed"? How does this compare to what we read here in Matthew 5?
- Is it significant that Jesus starts His sermon with blessings? Why do you think He began here? What does He want us to know about how God sees us and responds to us?
- As we saw in the video, these eight Beatitudes are counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. Looking at each of the 8 characteristics Jesus commends, how would a person like this stand out in our world? In what ways would their life be attractive? In what ways could it be abrasive?
- How do the Beatitudes simultaneously challenge us and comfort us? In what ways do they encourage you to know that God values you? In what ways do they motivate you to want to change your life?
- These eight qualities aren't just descriptions of the Kingdom life; they are descriptions of the King Himself. How do we see Jesus revealed in each of the Beatitudes? How did He live them out? Do these Beatitudes change how you see Him? How you see yourself?

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WEEK 2

BACKWARDS MOTIVATIONS | GROUP DISCUSSION

Why do you do what you do? Truth be told, it's often difficult for us to identify our motivations. There are some things we do without thinking and others we do simply because that was the way we were taught. For the Jews in Jesus' day, the commands of the Old Testament sat at the very foundation of all they had ever known. The Law didn't just represent their chosen-ness among the nations; it represented all God wanted them to do. In the Sermon on the Mount, however, Jesus reminded them that following the Law is not just a matter of what you do, but a matter of who you are.

Open your discussion by reading Matthew 5:17-20 (Contemporary English Version) aloud as a group. As you've read the passage this week (and just now) what has resonated with you? As you imagine yourself on the hillside, how do you think you would have heard these words? What has stuck out to you as you've studied them this week?

QUESTIONS

- What are some of the reasons people follow God's Laws? As you think back over your life, what have been some of your motivations and how have they changed? What motivations do you think Jesus wants us to have when it comes to following the Law?
- As Jesus shows us in this section, following the Law isn't just about behavior, it's about the heart. Why do we tend to focus more on behavior modification than heart transformation? Is it harder to change our actions or change our hearts? How do the two go hand-in-hand?
- Jesus gives six examples of the true meaning of the Law in this passage: Murder (5:21-26), Adultery (5:27-30), Divorce (5:31-32), Vows (5:33-37), Revenge (5:38-42), and Love (5:43-48). If you could sum up His teaching in one sentence, what would you say Jesus is teaching about each of these subjects? How does He challenge what we normally think?
- During your weekly reading, you were asked to identify which of these reimagined commands you find the most difficult. Which did you choose? Why? How does Jesus' teaching on this subject confront our culture? How does it confront your own heart?
- The final challenge Jesus gives in this section comes in Matthew 5:48: "But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect." In what ways can we mirror God's perfection? In what ways will we continue to fall short time after time? How do the challenging words in this passage point us to our ultimate need for Christ?

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WEEK 3

BACKWARDS RELIGION | GROUP DISCUSSION

One of mankind's greatest needs is our need to connect with God. Different traditions throughout the years have taught different things about the practices that help us know Him better. In the Jewish tradition, there were three great acts of piety: Giving, Prayer, and Fasting. It's not shocking that when Jesus decided to talk about spiritual disciplines, He chose these exact practices. What is surprising, however, is what He said about each of them. Once again, His teachings force us to think not just about our habits, but about the heart underneath them.

Open your discussion by reading Matthew 6:1-18 aloud as a group (The Message). What stands out to you as you read these verses? What observations did you walk away with from your personal study and/or watching this week's video?

QUESTIONS

• Why are we so tempted to do our "acts of righteousness" for other people to see them? How does drawing attention to ourselves violate the very purpose of spiritual disciplines? What do we miss out on when we make these things all about ourselves?

• Sarah said in the video that spiritual disciplines are "building muscles we can't see." What are some benefits of spiritual disciplines you have seen in your own life? Which spiritual disciplines have impacted you the most? In what ways have they made you spiritually stronger? How have they helped you persevere in times of difficulty?

• "Habit stacking" is the practice of adding beneficial habits to the things you already do on a daily basis. What are some things you have to do every day? How might you incorporate spiritual practices into those events/times? What's one practice you could try to "habit stack" this week?

• What's been your experience with the "Lord's prayer"? Has anyone in the Group utilized this prayer as part of their spiritual rhythms? What did that look like? As you look at this prayer, what stands out to you about it? How does Jesus' prayer compare/contrast with the way you pray?

• The way Jesus talks about these spiritual disciplines reminds us that this Kingdom is run by our Father. How does that change the way we approach these spiritual practices? How should this truth motivate us to practice these things? In what ways does giving, praying, and fasting for "our Father" help us when we don't feel like doing these things?

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WEEK 4

BACKWARDS TREASURE | GROUP DISCUSSION

We all have things we value. Whether it's a family heirloom that's been passed down for generations or a prized possession we display on the mantle, we all have those things in our life that hold great worth for us. In the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spends some time talking about those things we treasure. His words remind us of a startling truth: Our physical comforts can carry spiritual consequences.

Open your discussion by reading Matthew 6:19-34 aloud as a group (NLT). What stands out to you as you read these verses? What's been some of your personal experience with worry and anxiety? How would these words have spoken to you in that moment?

QUESTIONS

- This week, you were challenged to identify the things in life you treasure. What were some of the common threads you found there? What are some of the good things your treasures say about you? What are some of the bad things?
- Why do you think Jesus addresses the topics of money and worry in this sermon? What does our response to these issues say about us? Why are they Kingdom issues? Where does God want our security and value to come from? How do money and possessions warp our concept of who we are and what we're about?
- What are some of the things you worry about on a regular basis? What is it about these things that causes you such anxiety? Is this kind of worry helpful or harmful? Why? How do our worries reveal a lack of trust in God? What are some practical steps we can take to help turn those worries over to God?
- What are some ways that earthly treasures can distract us from pursuing the Kingdom? What are some ways they can help us in our pursuit of the Kingdom? How do we know the difference between pursuing something for our kingdoms and pursuing it for His? How do we keep our eyes on the treasures that really matter?
- Brandon closed with a quote from Paul David Tripp: "...the King we have come to worship [on Sundays] is not the king we have served all week." How do we create better alignment between our workweek and our weekend worship? What would it look like for someone to live out the words of Matthew 5:33? How can we do that as individuals? How can we do that as a Group?

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WEEK 5

BACKWARDS RELATIONSHIPS | GROUP DISCUSSION

From the very beginning of the Bible, it's been clear that mankind is meant to live in relationship. As He looked at the solitary man, God Himself said, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Just because it's tough for us to be alone doesn't mean that it's easy for us to be together. Relationships can be necessary and difficult at the same time. Jesus understood this, which is why He gave some pointers for navigating this essential (and sometimes exasperating!) area of life.

Open your discussion by reading Matthew 7:1-12 aloud as a group (NLT). What stands out to you as you read these verses? What's been some of your personal experience with worry and anxiety? How would these words have spoken to you in that moment?

QUESTIONS

• What comes to mind when you hear the words of Matthew 7:1? How have these words been used and misused in the past? Why is judgment so much easier than relationship? Why do you think we have such a tendency to build ourselves up by tearing other people down?

• Derek had this observation: "The God I tend to worship the most is me." Do you think this is true for most people? Why or why not? How does this statement explain our difficulties in relationships? How does it explain our difficulty in living out the Sermon on the Mount in general?

• This section of the Sermon on the Mount contains a very memorable image of specks and logs in our eyes. What are some ways we try to minimize our sin and maximize the faults of others? Why is it so easy for us to be gracious with our own faults and so condemning of our neighbors? How can we apply the "Golden Rule" here?

• Think about your relationship with God. In what ways has God been generous with you? In what ways has He both corrected and forgiven your faults? Think of a difficult relationship in your life. What would it look like for us to have this same kind of relational generosity with this person?

• You were asked this week to think of what it might look like for someone to perfectly live out the "Golden Rule." What do you think this kind of life would look like? How would this person treat their family? Their friends? Their coworkers? Their neighbors? How does Jesus show us what it looks like to perfectly follow the Golden Rule?

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WEEK 6

BACKWARDS LIVING | GROUP DISCUSSION

We face an incredible number of choices every day. We have to choose everything from what we have for breakfast to the route we use to travel to work. Yet, we recognize that some choices in life are far more significant than others. The shoes you select for today's outfit are much less significance than the spouse you choose to spend your life with. There are choices that can change your life. It turns out there are even decisions that can impact eternity. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to the most significant decision point of all: Who do we say He is?

Open your discussion by reading Matthew 7:13-27 aloud as a group (The Message). Can you imagine the reaction of the crowd as they heard these words? What would your response have been? Why does Jesus demand such a response in our lives?

QUESTIONS

- Think of some of the key decision points in your life. What choice did you make? What criteria did you use to help you make that decision? How do you think your life would be different if you had chosen differently? Looking back, how do you see God working in some of those decisions?
- Jesus uses the imagery of two paths throughout this passage. What are some of the ways He describes the choice before us? In your opinion, what is the difference between the wide path and the narrow one? Why do so many people choose the wide path? Why can't we always see that the path we're on is leading us to destruction?
- Why does Jesus call us to relationship over religion? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? What are some ways your relationship with Him has grown and deepened over the years? What are some ways you want to see that relationship continue to grow?
- What "storms" have you experienced in your life? How did those storms reveal the foundation you were building on? In what ways does suffering reveal who we really are? How does the firm foundation Jesus provides help us to stay focused in times of suffering and pain? How does hope help us to stand firm?
- What's been your biggest takeaway from the Sermon on the Mount? How does living out Jesus' words in this Sermon help us to see the backwards ways of this world? How can we, as a Group, continue to challenge one another to live these words out?