

A FRUITFUL LIFE

DISCOVERING JESUS' INVITATION
IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT



AN 8-WEEK BIBLE
STUDY EXPERIENCE

ASHLEY HALES & BRYCE HALES

SERMON SERIES FOR THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND *A FRUITFUL LIFE*

Often Christians come to the Sermon on the Mount confused: are we supposed to literally follow all it says? Is this possible? Is the Sermon just meant as a sort of collection of nice sayings from Jesus? In *A Fruitful Life*, we remind you that Jesus' own metaphor of fruit-bearing (from Matthew 7:20) is key to understanding what kind of disciples Jesus is growing. We must be abiding in Christ, reliant on the Spirit, and following the Father to be in healthy soil (and in turn, to be the sorts of people that look and love like Jesus). We will encourage participants to reflect on each portion of scripture, understand the hard sayings of Christ, and be reminded that grace always has the first word.

This Sermon Series Outline provides you with a way to study Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) in your church, with Sunday morning sermons reinforced by discussion in Small Groups and daily devotionals throughout the week.

Each week we provide you with a summary of the week and some key themes for your message. For these key themes, we don't want to just give more biblical information, rather each week, you'll see we focus on three things (which could be your three sermon points!): 1) How does this connect to the human experience and the deeper questions or insecurities we have? 2) How does the text answer that question or issue? And 3) How does this text point us to Jesus?

LOGISTICS AND DETAILS

This Sermon Series guide integrates *A Fruitful Life* into a weekly sermon series for a church. Though the book breaks the Sermon on the Mount into 8 weeks, pastors may want to do a 9-week series so they can do a final wrap-up sermon or, depending on when groups meet, a generalized intro sermon may be more useful. Regarding timing, each Sunday the pastor would plan to preach on the relevant passage from the Sermon on the Mount (for instance, week 1 on the Beatitudes) and then, during the week, small groups would be watching video content to reinforce the sermon (week 1 from *A Fruitful Life*) and doing individual devotionals for 5 days. We have provided you with a 9-week outline with a wrap-up sermon outline.

WEEK 1:

THE FRUITFUL LIFE OF THE KINGDOM

MATTHEW 5:1-16

SUMMARY

This sermon on the Beatitudes introduces the series. We are using the lens of fruitfulness throughout the series, so you'll want to introduce that concept in this sermon. Authors Bryce and Ashley Hales write: "When we talk about fruitfulness in this study we mean **growing to look more like Jesus as we are connected to him, so that we live and love like he did**. We must be dependent and connected to Jesus to grow. Toward the end of his sermon in chapter 7 verse 20, Jesus uses this exact metaphor of fruitfulness: it's by our fruits we will be able to recognize both false teachers and Jesus' disciples. When we remain in Jesus, we will look more like him, producing spiritual fruit that will last."

KEY THEMES FOR THE SERMON

- Connection to human experience: We all have a vision for our lives, what we imagine the good life to look like or to "finally arrive." Some are doing this well or others fall into despair because we feel like we're failing.
- Text addresses this question: Jesus lays out his vision for a fruitful life in the Beatitudes and it's surprising who's included. He welcomes the "spiritual zeroes."
- Connection to Jesus: The Beatitudes show us that entrance into the Kingdom is all of grace. We don't earn our favor in God's sight by living up to his standards and yet, Jesus gives us all the blessings of his Kingdom through his life, death, and resurrection.

Midweek your small groups would be doing the Week 1 material in *A Fruitful Life*.

WEEK 2:

FRUITFULNESS AND GOD'S LAW

MATTHEW 5:17-37

SUMMARY

This sermon looks at the relationship between fruitfulness and God's law. Western culture simultaneously emphasizes a "you do you"/anything goes mantra as well as the sense that you need to earn love and acceptance through your accomplishments and success. The authors discuss in the video teaching: "Jesus shows us that God's word is neither a measuring stick for shame and failure, nor an irrelevant distraction that constrains our individual liberty. Instead, it's a teacher that points us to Christ. We tend to look for an "either/or approach" to God's word, but Jesus' perspective is "both/and." The Law and the Prophets both reveal the perfect love of God, which is to be our model for living, and point us to Jesus – the one who fulfills and keeps the Law."

KEY THEMES FOR THE SERMON

- Connection to human experience: Even some Christians think the Old Testament is irrelevant, that God doesn't mean what he says. The commands of God are impossible to keep, so if we don't understand how his commands fit with his grace, we will live disintegrated, unfruitful lives.
- Text addresses this question: Jesus says the law isn't abolished, but rather fulfilled in him.
- Connection to Jesus: In our failure to keep God's moral law, we can cast ourselves on Jesus' mercy, knowing that he took the consequences of our law-breaking, and gives us his record of law-keeping when we are in Him.

Midweek your small groups would be doing the Week 2 material in *A Fruitful Life*.

WEEK 3:

FRUITFULNESS IS JUSTICE AND MERCY

MATTHEW 5:38-6:4

SUMMARY

In Matthew 5:38-6:4, Jesus calls his followers beyond a mere demand for justice to embody mercy. While the ancient law of “an eye for an eye” was revolutionary in establishing fair justice, Jesus teaches that true fruitfulness comes when we relinquish our rights and extend undeserved kindness. In a world obsessed with fairness and retaliation, Jesus invites us to respond with love, generosity, and mercy—even to our enemies. This way of living is not passive weakness but the transformative power of the gospel in action. We can only live this way when we see that our security is not in demanding justice for ourselves, but in receiving the mercy and righteousness of Christ. As we grow in his mercy, we bear the fruit of a life that reflects the justice and generosity of God.

KEY THEMES FOR THE SERMON

- Connection to human experience: Deep down, we have a built-in sense of justice and fairness, especially when we feel wronged. Our impulse is to demand what we are owed and retaliate when slighted. This speaks to a deeper insecurity: Will justice ever be truly served? Will I be taken advantage of if I don't fight back?
- Text addresses this question: Jesus does not erase justice but calls his followers beyond it. True righteousness is not found in demanding fairness but in freely giving more than what is deserved. Whether by turning the other cheek, loving our enemies, or giving in secret, Jesus calls us to a life of radical mercy—trusting that God sees and rewards what is done in faith.
- Connection to Jesus: Nowhere is justice and mercy more perfectly embodied than in Christ himself. On the cross, he absorbed the injustice of the world, taking our sin upon himself and offering us his righteousness in return. This transforms us into people who no longer fight to assert our rights but who reflect Jesus' merciful love to the world. In him, justice and mercy meet, and we are called to live in that reality.

Midweek your small groups would be doing the Week 3 material in *A Fruitful Life*.

WEEK 4:

FRUITFULNESS GROWS IN THE SOIL OF PRAYER

MATTHEW 6:5-15

SUMMARY

In Matthew 6:5-15, Jesus teaches that true prayer is neither a performance nor a formula but an invitation into a deep and dependent relationship with our Father. Prayer is the soil in which fruitfulness grows, as it reorients our lives around God's kingdom, forms us in humility, and cultivates trust in His provision. Jesus warns against hypocrisy in prayer, calling us instead to an intimate conversation with the God who knows our needs before we ask. The Lord's Prayer then shapes our priorities, beginning with God's holiness and kingdom, aligning our desires with His will, and teaching us dependence on Him for our daily needs, forgiveness, and guidance. Through prayer, we relinquish our own kingdoms, embrace the Father's love, and experience the transforming power of His presence.

KEY THEMES FOR THE SERMON

- Connection to human experience: Human beings long for a sense of connection, purpose, and security, but often, our prayers reveal our insecurities. We may use prayer to impress others or to try to control God, reflecting our fears of inadequacy and our desire for validation.
- Text addresses this question: In a world obsessed with self-fulfillment, we often pray for our own desires, wondering if God hears or if prayer makes a difference. We struggle with doubts, distractions, and disappointment in prayer. The Lord's Prayer reshapes our perspective, beginning with God's glory and kingdom. By praying, "Your kingdom come, your will be done," we surrender our self-centeredness, allowing God to transform us and our world according to His good purposes.
- Connection to Jesus: Jesus, the true Son of God, not only teaches us to pray but enables us to pray by His grace. He shares His relationship with the Father with us, and through His life, death, and resurrection, He makes the way for us to approach God with confidence. In Christ, we are not orphans but beloved children who can pray with boldness and trust.

Midweek your small groups would be doing the Week 4 material in *A Fruitful Life*.

WEEK 5:

THE COST OF FRUITFULNESS

MATTHEW 6:16-34

SUMMARY

Fruitfulness in the Christian life is not accidental; it requires intentional cultivation, including the difficult but necessary work of pruning. In Matthew 6:16-34, Jesus teaches about fasting, treasure, and anxiety—exposing how our spiritual practices, financial priorities, and deepest worries reveal the true state of our hearts. Rather than using religious disciplines to manipulate God or hoard wealth for security, we are called to trust in our heavenly Father, who knows our needs and invites us to seek first His kingdom. Like a gardener pruning for greater yield, God lovingly removes distractions and false dependencies so that we might bear the fruit of faith, generosity, and trust in Him. This passage challenges us to examine what we truly treasure and whether we are willing to endure the cost of being formed into fruitful disciples.

KEY THEMES FOR THE SERMON

- Connection to human experience: We long for control, fearing scarcity and seeking security in wealth, achievements, or religious performance. Anxiety over our needs and future often reveals where our trust lies.
- Text addresses this question: We can turn practices like fasting and giving into ways to prove our righteousness or earn divine favor. Instead of tools for self-improvement, Jesus calls us to see them as pathways to deeper dependence on God. By fasting in secret, giving generously, and praying with sincerity, we shift our focus from earthly rewards to heavenly treasure—growing in trust and spiritual vitality.
- Connection to Jesus: Jesus embodies what it means to live with full dependence on the Father, resisting the temptation to secure His own needs apart from God. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus shows us that true abundance is not found in self-sufficiency but in surrender to God's care. In Him, we have the ultimate assurance that our needs—both physical and spiritual—will be met.

Midweek your small groups would be doing the Week 5 material in *A Fruitful Life*.

WEEK 6:

FRUITFULNESS IS NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT

MATTHEW 7:1-11

SUMMARY

In Matthew 7:1-11, Jesus challenges us to live out the values of the Kingdom, moving beyond mere observation to active participation in the process of growth and mercy. Judgment is a dangerous spectator sport when we are passive, focused on others while ignoring our own flaws. Jesus teaches that we are called not to condemn but to engage in self-reflection, to recognize our own need for mercy, and to extend that mercy to others. The passage transitions from how we treat others to how we approach God in prayer—actively seeking, asking, and knocking with the confidence that God, our good Father, will respond. True fruitfulness comes when we are fully engaged, relying on God’s mercy to transform our hearts and actions.

KEY THEMES FOR THE SERMON

- Connection to human experience: We often feel the need to judge or be judged because of our own insecurities and our fear of being judged harshly. It stems from our desire for control, certainty, and superiority. This need for judgment is also linked to deeper questions of worth—how we see ourselves in relation to others. Do we measure up? Are we good enough?
- Text addresses this question: Jesus answers these insecurities with a call to mercy and self-examination. He teaches that the measure of judgment we use on others will be the measure used on us, calling us to reflect on our own need for grace. Instead of condemning others, we are to help them with humility, aware of our own failings, and offering mercy rather than judgment. This is not about ignoring right or wrong, but about offering grace, not condemnation.
- Connection to Jesus: Jesus is the embodiment of what it means to live a fruitful life. He perfectly modeled mercy, humility, and self-reflection throughout His life, always seeking the will of the Father. His death and resurrection offer the ultimate act of mercy, inviting us to participate in His redemptive work. Just as He engaged in active prayer and dependence on the Father, we are called to ask, seek, and knock with confidence, knowing that God will generously give us what we need for true fruitfulness.

Midweek your small groups would be doing the Week 6 material in *A Fruitful Life*.

WEEK 7:

BEARING FRUIT FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

MATTHEW 7:12-20

SUMMARY

In Matthew 7:12-20, Jesus calls his followers to live fruitful lives that reflect His character. The passage challenges us to move beyond external appearances and worldly standards of success, urging us to bear true, godly fruit that serves others. Jesus offers a powerful contrast between false and true teachers, warning that fruitfulness is not measured by outward growth but by the quality of one's life and actions. True fruitfulness arises from being rooted in healthy soil—specifically, the life-giving connection to Jesus. The way we live and the fruit we bear speak volumes about our relationship with Him and our impact on the world around us.

KEY THEMES FOR THE SERMON

- Connection to human experience: As humans, we all long to make a meaningful difference in the world. This passage touches on our insecurities around what truly counts in life—success, influence, or how we are perceived. Many of us fear that we may be missing out on true purpose, or that our actions won't matter in the long run. Jesus' words offer clarity, showing us that what we do and how we live matters, but it must come from a place of true, Christ-centered fruitfulness.
- Text addresses this question: The world is full of voices calling for our attention, some promising success and growth without the depth that comes from a genuine connection with Christ. Jesus answers the insecurities and confusion we face by teaching us the importance of discerning the fruit of others and our own lives. Good fruit isn't about fame, status, or wealth; it's about character that reflects the heart of Jesus, demonstrated in how we love and serve others.
- Connection to Jesus: The ultimate answer to our insecurities and questions about purpose lies in Jesus. Just as a tree cannot bear good fruit unless it is rooted in healthy soil, our lives can't bear lasting fruit unless we are intimately connected to Jesus, the true vine (John 15:5). He is the perfect example of what it means to live a fruitful life, and through His life, death, and resurrection, we are invited to be transformed and empowered to bear good fruit for the sake of others.

Midweek your small groups would be doing the Week 7 material in *A Fruitful Life*.

WEEK 8:

BEARING FRUIT TO THE ENDS

MATTHEW 7:21-27

SUMMARY

In Matthew 7:21-27, Jesus underscores the essential reality that true discipleship involves both hearing and acting upon His words, not simply performing religious acts. Those who build their lives on the solid foundation of Jesus' teachings bear fruit that endures. Jesus warns against empty professions of faith, emphasizing that true salvation comes from knowing Him intimately and living in obedience to the will of God. The image of the wise and foolish builders starkly contrasts those who build their lives on the rock of Christ's teachings with those who build on shifting, unstable ground. The message of "Bearing Fruit to the End" invites us to examine our lives—are we truly living as disciples of Jesus, letting His words shape our every action, or are we relying on external signs of religiosity? The sermon challenges us to build a lasting, fruitful life grounded in Jesus, by walking the path of obedience through His grace.

KEY THEMES FOR THE SERMON

- Connection to human experience: Many of us grapple with the fear of failure, insecurity about the stability of our faith, and uncertainty about what truly matters in life. Are we really living out what we claim to believe? Am I enough in God's eyes? This passage speaks directly to these questions, calling us to evaluate whether our faith is grounded in a true, transformative relationship with Jesus or simply in outward acts.
- Text addresses this question: Jesus answers the deepest insecurities by showing that authentic discipleship isn't about external performance but about a personal relationship with Him that results in a life built on His teachings. The wise builder—the one who hears and does the will of God—illustrates how our actions, grounded in faith, show the fruit of transformation.
- Connection to Jesus: The text points us to Jesus as the ultimate foundation of our lives. He is the rock on which we must build, the one who gives us the grace to bear fruit. Only through Him, as our foundation, can we live lives that endure the storms of life. The invitation to build on the rock is an invitation to a life lived in intimate union with Jesus, whose life and death make this transformation possible.

Midweek your small groups would be doing the Week 8 material in *A Fruitful Life*.

WEEK 9:

A FRUITFUL LIFE IN CHRIST

MATTHEW 7:28-29

SUMMARY

As we conclude our study of the Sermon on the Mount, we reflect on the authority of Jesus that leaves all who hear His teaching in awe. Jesus' words are not mere wisdom; they carry the weight of the divine, offering not just guidance but the transformative power of God Himself. Through His authority, He leads us toward a fruitful life that only He can bring about. This passage reminds us that fruitfulness is not about our striving but about yielding to the work of the Spirit in us, empowered by the authority of Jesus. His call is not just to follow His teachings but to trust in the One who makes obedience possible.

KEY THEMES FOR THE SERMON

- Connection to human experience: The human experience is often marked by a struggle to find direction, purpose, and lasting change. We ask, "How can we live a life that truly bears fruit?" The deep insecurities of feeling powerless to change or live up to moral ideals are real. The Sermon on the Mount lays out a vision for life that feels both beautiful and unattainable, leaving us wondering how such transformation is possible.
- Text addresses this question: Matthew 7:28-29 points us to the authority of Jesus, which isn't just a form of wisdom but a life-giving power. Jesus' words are not like any human teacher; He speaks with the authority of God. His teaching is not only to be admired but to be followed because He holds the power to bring about the transformation He demands. The call to live a fruitful life is not a burden but an invitation to experience the grace and strength that only Jesus, with His divine authority, can provide.
- Connection to Jesus: Jesus is the One with ultimate authority, and His life and words demonstrate what a fruitful life truly looks like. He fulfills the Sermon on the Mount, embodying its teachings and making it possible for His disciples to live in alignment with God's will. In the face of our inability to live up to this standard, Jesus provides the power through His Spirit to bring about the change He desires in us. He is the answer to our deepest need for transformation, and it is through His authority that we are empowered to bear fruit in His kingdom.

Midweek your small groups could meet to discuss what they have learned through this series, and how God's Spirit is using the Sermon on the Mount to transform them. Groups could read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) out loud together, and pray for continued growth in areas the Spirit is leading.



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