

September Prayers

Week 1

The Ultimate Christian Guidebook

The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is, in summary, the basis of Christian living. It is a concise definition of the Gospel, though it doesn't seem so concise when read nonstop - it makes enormous demands which, in our humanness, seem daunting. It can overwhelm us to the point that we see that we must seek God for help to do as Jesus said. That is precisely what he intended.

In all his teachings which followed that Sermon, Jesus never wavered from the unequivocal ideals in it. The demands stayed high. But this same Jesus tenderly offered his love and grace to help everyone to do what he said, and he did so in ways that were specific and special for each person he encountered. In every case, his love and grace were as solid and unbending as the commands he gave.

Writer Philip Yancey said that the Sermon makes us look at the great distance between us and God, but that any attempts to reduce the distance by trying to moderate its demands will miss the point completely. Yancey said, "We all stand on level ground: murderers and temper-throwers...thieves and coveters. We are all desperate." No one is exempt. Not from the commandments.

And not from the love and grace.

Monday. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. ...anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. ...go and be reconciled to your brother." (from Matt. 5:21-24)

Lord, we know from Paul (Eph. 4:26) that it's OK to be angry without sinning, but maybe only being angry at sin itself. Still, we know about the times we really have sinned in anger, exactly the way you taught against here. Forgive us. Instill your love in our hearts in place of anger. Forgive our harsh words and teach us how to be reconciled with those whom we have offended or who have, in turn, offended us. I pray also today for...

Tuesday. "Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or – worse! – stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven where it's safe... It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be..." (from Matt. 6:19-21, *The Message*)

Lord, I know my most treasured possession is my relationship with you and the hope I have of a future – even an eternity – with you. But I confess that I get off track and put that in the back of my mind. I put too much value on the stuff of life. I think about money, about things I have and want, about relationships with other people, and on and on. I know those are important – for now anyway – but I think too much about them as if they were my reason for living. Forgive me and draw me back to you. Every day, Lord. I do love you. Help me to love you more. And I pray...

Wednesday. "Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults – unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It's easy to see the smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own." (Matt. 7:1,2, *The Message*)

Jesus, you know about all of us and how we generally are polite and try not to do this judging and criticizing. Openly, anyway. But with you, we have to be honest and admit we do this very thing in our minds much too often. And sometimes what's in our minds slips out in words or actions like little looks and shrugs – mental sneers! How ridiculous your words make that seem. But worse, how unlike you it is. Forgive us and remind us with hard lessons, if necessary, that we're to love as you love –

unconditionally. And that certainly means never being judgmental. Help us, Lord. I also pray today for...

Thursday. “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.” (Matt. 7:6)

Dear Jesus, I know I’m told to be a witness of your love, never a cause for its ridicule. I confess that witnessing seems risky and makes me want to avoid it altogether. Why? Maybe because I don’t want to embarrass *myself*?! But I hope it’s actually because I don’t want to embarrass your cause. Once again, I am dependent on you to lead me. Help me to be bold and forthright about the truth, the *fact* of the great Good News – it truly is a fact. Lend me your wisdom to know when and where and how to present it in ways that will bring others to you, bring glory to your name. It’s a big responsibility and I can’t do it by myself. I lean on you and I also pray...

Friday. “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; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Matt. 7:7,8)

What a beautiful promise, Lord! It’s among the greatest gems in your word. This tells me I can and should keep on praying, no matter what happens. Thank you! You know me so you know I want a lot of specific things; they all seem right and good to me. But when I ask, they don’t always come through. Actually, sometimes it seems they almost never come through. Help me to see that’s OK, that I should keep praying, because you’re hearing and will see to all those things according to your wisdom and your will. Help me to remember that the great thing for me is that I’m intimately connecting with you, living in your presence, staying open to you, waiting to be led, learning about loving – and that kind of *receiving* is the greatest prayer answer of all. So that’s what I ask for, seek for, knock on the door for. I pray also...

Saturday. “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.”
(Matt. 7:13,14)

Jesus, I see that this is so, but I am saddened about the many who won't follow you as I seek to do. Help me to be more active in telling the Good News so I might help increase the number who find the gate to *real life*. Help me to keep being disciplined through your love myself so that what might first seem hard will become easier, so that what might seem a heavy burden will become a lighter one as you surround my life with your love. Then help me find good, solid, effective ways to demonstrate that to those who haven't yet found out about you. I also have these other things to bring to you...

Week 2

Monday. Paul admired the Christians in Thessalonica, Greece: **"...you became a model to all the believers..." "The Lord's message rang out from you ... your faith in God has become known everywhere..."** (from 1 Thess. 1:7,8)

Dear Lord, it's not that I want someone to brag on me – at least I hope I don't ever come to that – it's just that these people seemed to be doing everything right, and I want to do it right also. Help me to become a model believer, but also to understand what humility through your grace is. By myself, I'm just who I am. And by myself, I'll never be better than that, no matter how hard I try to invent myself. Create in me an urgency to be your child completely. Take who I am and make me more of who you are, I pray. Help me live and act in ways that convincingly show what a relationship with you can be. That somebody else will see and do likewise – what a goal! I pray for it to happen. And I pray for...

Tuesday. Paul said, **"May God our Father himself and our Master Jesus clear the road to you! And may the Master pour on the love so it fills your lives and splashes over on everyone around you, just as it does from us to you. May you be infused with strength and purity, filled with confidence in the presence of God our Father when our Master Jesus arrives with all his followers."** (1 Thess. 3:12,13, *The Message*)

Could anyone ever offer better "good wishes" for another?! Father, I pray these words for myself, that this will describe my life. And I pray these words for our church and for every single soul in it. What a church we might be! What a lighthouse! Lead us all there, I pray, dear Lord. And I also pray for...

Wednesday. **"Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work."** (1 Thess. 5:12-13a.)

Father, thank you for the Christian leaders you have given us – people whom you have called to help us learn about life with you:

our pastors, our denominational leaders, our musicians, other preachers and teachers and writers – people you have gifted with abilities of many kinds. It is marvelous to see your hand at work among your people, and they bless us as they fulfill their callings. We pray for them. Ennoble them with your presence, encourage them, energize them, and, above all, increase their enjoyment of your love for them. Then, rather than taking them all for granted, let us find meaningful ways to express appreciation and, indeed, become your tools as you answer this very prayer. I pray now for...

Thursday. “Get along among yourselves, each of you doing your part. Our counsel is that you warn the freeloaders to get a move on. Gently encourage the stragglers, and reach out for the exhausted, pulling them to their feet. Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs.” (1 Thess. 5:13b-14, *The Message*)

Lord, here is a place we all desperately need your constant help. Alone, we do a poor job of it. We confess: it’s easy to get along with *those who make it easy*; others make it hard. Help us find ways to be patient, to go the extra step in kindness. Help us look to you to see how you want us to live together. Let us not rely on what we think are our own fine abilities in all this. Rather, show us how to be used by you, to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Whatever we might think causes the problems, or whatever the results – you know all that, so you need to guide our reactions. Don’t let us err by figuring it out on our own and messing it all up. We need you so, Lord. Stay with us. And now I pray for...

Friday. “And be careful that when you get on each other’s nerves you don’t snap at each other. Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out. Be cheerful no matter what.” (1 Thess. 5:15,16, *The Message*)

Lord, this looks like a supposition that we *will* get on each other’s nerves – another part of the problem in getting along with others. We confess that our own affairs and stress sometimes cause us to leap out and snap at people. While that’s not an excuse, it helps explain our confession: forgive us, Lord. At those times, it’s not top on the agenda to look past people’s foibles to find the best in them – and be cheerful at the same time! But it’s wrong. And it’s

weak. It's just more proof that without you, we fail. Start us off in all our days with the right attitude, one in which we center on you before we think or do anything else. With your forgiveness, give us guidance. Grant us peaceful, thoughtful, even *cheerful* minds. I pray also for...

Saturday. "Pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live. Don't suppress the Spirit, and don't stifle those who have a word from the Master. On the other hand, don't be gullible. Check out everything, and keep only what's good. Throw out anything tainted with evil. (1 Thess. 5:17-22, *The Message*)"

Dear Lord, I need to learn more about making prayer a lifestyle and it seems a way to do that is to give thanks to you. So I thank you today for all the blessings and guidance which you have given me – even when I didn't know it at the time. But I can look back and see that it happened. Help me to live so that the Holy Spirit has freer rein in me than ever before, so that as I pray I will feel the Spirit's presence. As I make prayer my focus, help me always to recognize your leading as it might come through others. Give me discernment so I see the good and avoid the wrong. Again, I thank you, my Lord, and I pray for these other things...

Week 3

Monday. “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ...we preach Christ crucified.” (from 1 Cor. 1:20-25)

Great God Almighty, you make it clear that in all the things of this world – all the great ideas and inventions and pleasures and possessions – all that is as foolishness in comparison to your greatness. We worship you, God. Bring home to us the truth of who you are and how small we *and all our affairs* are when stacked up – however high! – against your majesty as our God. And yet you have given us your love in personalized ways so that each of us can know you privately, our own individual God. The life and teaching and acts of your Son, the crucified Christ, tells the complete story about your love. O, how we in our smallness thank you in your greatness! Don't let us ever forget it, God! I pray also for...

Tuesday. “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.” (from 1 Cor. 1:31 to 2:5)

(Consider this: Jesus planned everything out carefully. He chose some special people who would act and talk – and even write – so that all the coming generations of the world could see what the Gospel was about. And he didn't let the issue get confused by allowing those messengers to put too much of themselves into it. Otherwise, it would have been their message, not God's. So it's always been God's power, operating through the Holy Spirit, that makes the message live with vibrancy and conviction!)

O God, thank you for the grand plan you put in place so that all of us can hear about your love and believe it and accept it. We are humbled that you love us that much. Guide us to a deeper understanding of *your* message as we move forward on our journeys with you. I pray now for...

Wednesday. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him...” (from 1 Cor. 2:9)

Dear God, I fear I never really take in all there is for me to learn and enjoy about the blessings of your love for me. Reveal to me where I err, what I do to deter that learning. If it is failing to trust you with my worries, forgive me and teach me to pray. If it is preoccupation with my own self-interests, forgive me and cause me to focus on you instead of me. If it is indolence, mental laziness, acceptance of routine, then wake me up and enliven me to look to you. You are the author of my faith. Be its finisher, I pray. I also pray now for...

Thursday. “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2:13-15)

Great God, your word makes it quite clear here that we must be in a full relationship with you, with Christ and with the Holy Spirit, if we are ever to enjoy the full beauty of your love, to reap all its benefits. Bring us into that relationship, we pray. Take us to that higher plane. Let us abandon all other holds on our lives, those things which bind us to the uselessness of life without you. This is a prayer which we offer through a leap of faith, because the mystery of the bounty of your love eludes us until you rescue us from ourselves. In expectation of your leading, I also pray for...

Friday. “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.” “For we are God’s fellow workers...” (from 1 Cor. 3:7-9)

Dear Lord, while we have learned to respect and listen to those whom you have called as leaders among us, help us to remember that it is *you* who leads them. It is you who brings them *and* us from sin to redemption. *You* are the source of it all, so don’t let us build pedestals, no matter how much we cherish your appointed servants. We pray for these who study and work to reveal the glories of your love to us. And we pray for ourselves

that we, too, will be open and available to work in your kingdom. As we benefit from the labors of others, keep us sharply conscious of our own responsibilities to be witnesses – sometimes it's much too easy to coast and just be sponges. Forgive us for that, we pray: don't let us be takers only, but givers also, giving testimony of the marvelous work of your love in *our* lives. I pray now for...

Saturday. Paul cautioned the Christians at Corinth about disagreements they were having within the congregation. He pointed out that his role had been to help lay the foundation for their church, but that all of them needed to work together, using great care in how they went about it. The end result, he said, was the church itself. **“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?”** (from 1 Cor. 3:9-16)

Dear Lord, thank you for your plan of salvation and your plan to have all your people work and thrive together as one body. While we see the need to do that, we confess that each of us slacks off from time to time, not always working equally, not always pulling together, too often going our separate ways, pursuing our separate interests. Draw us back to you, Lord, and unite us through the glorious bond that comes from your love for us. Ignite our spirits, collect our talents and abilities. Then mold us into one body which has the common goal of telling the Good News to our world. We would be your church, your temple, the place where your love is demonstrated for all to discover for themselves. I pray also for...

Week 4

Monday. “Everything is permissible – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible – but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.” (1 Cor. 10:23,24)

Lord, you have given us freedom to think and act in almost limitless ways – what a gift, but what a responsibility! You know our lives and how busy and confused they can get. So maybe that’s why we get disoriented in our journeys. In our freedom, we make wrong choices so that our paths swerve away from your will for us. So forgive us and help us to keep walking down straight roads, the ones you lay out for us. As you lead us into what is right for us, show us ways to help make things right for others whose lives intertwine with ours. I now pray for...

Tuesday. A great deal of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians was about how they should behave in all the aspects of their lives. Much of what he said was in keeping with the culture of the times. And in all of it, he emphasized that first in importance was to follow the leadership of Jesus. Then he ended the letter with admonitions like: “...**stand your ground. And don’t hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.**” “**Keep your eyes open, hold tight to your convictions, give it all you’ve got, be resolute, and love without stopping.**” (from 1 Cor. 15:58; 16:13,14, *The Message*)

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the many different ways you instruct us and lead us, but most especially for the Bible. And we thank you for giving us the ability to understand its admonitions and its encouragements and promises. Thank you for causing Paul to incite us to action in these words. Give us the wisdom to follow through: to give ourselves to you and the work of your kingdom; to stay alert and confident about our faith; to be resolute in it all; and to obey the commandment you emphasized so strongly – to love. And I pray...

Wednesday. “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” (2 Cor. 1:21,22)

Dear Lord, I pray today for yet more of the confidence that comes from your love for me. You really love me – do I even know it? Do I take it in and cherish it? Am I awed by the fact that the very Christ of the cross knows me and accepts me for who I am and am not? And that this same Savior stands ready to draw me in, to possess me, to guide me? Or am I blasé in my self-centeredness? I pray that I can keep that anointed feeling, that feeling of belonging to you – the Savior of the world! – and keep knowing that no matter what comes, you will always be my Lord and I will always be your child. Now I pray for...

Thursday. Paul wrote about a fellow who had caused trouble in the church. Church leaders had confronted the man who, Paul said, should be forgiven, “...and help him back on his feet. If all you do is pour on the guilt, you could very well drown him in it. My counsel now is to pour on the love.” He added, “The fact is that I’m joining in with *your* forgiveness, as Christ is with us, guiding us. After all, we don’t want to unwittingly give Satan an opening for yet more mischief – we’re not oblivious to his sly ways!” (from 2 Cor. 2:5-11, *The Message*)

Forgiving Lord, as you have lifted our sins from us, never to be remembered against us anymore, empower us to forgive others. Support us so that we will trade in our bad memories about other people for hearts full of love for them. Help us in this so that there is no door left open for more hurt or more sin to enter into the picture. We can’t do this alone; we must have your powerful love to make it happen. I pray for...

Friday. Paul repeatedly spotlighted how the new covenant through Jesus changed the old Mosaic Law and made it the prize worth living for. It gives hope: “Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.” It shows us how to witness: “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” It lights up our lives: “For God...made his light shine in our hearts to

give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (from 2 Cor. 3:12; 4:5,6)

Savior and Lord, we pray for the boldness which comes from our faith, our expectation that you are forever with us. We pray for ways to get beyond who we are and to become living statements of who you are. We pray for the light of your love to shine on us, never wavering, never shaded by our own erring ways. Let us keep on increasing in the knowledge of who you are to us and to all others whose lives touch ours. I pray also for...

Saturday.

*Now I say to you in conclusion,
life is hard, at times as hard as crucible steel.
It has its bleak and difficult moments.
Like the ever-flowing waters of the river,
life has its moments of drought and its moments of flood.
Like the ever-changing cycle of the seasons,
life has the soothing warmth of its summers
and the piercing chill of its winters.
But if one will hold on,
he will discover that God walks with him,
and that God is able to lift you from the fatigue of despair
to the buoyancy of hope
and transform dark and desolate valleys
into sunlit paths of inner peace.*

(Eulogy For The Martyred Children, Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963)

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” (2 Cor. 4:7-9)

Lord, as just one more of your jars of clay in this world, I have no merit on my own. But you honor me beyond measure with the love that you hold out to me, a love that is especially for me. As I seek to know and enjoy that love, I thank you with all the gratitude of my heart. Lend your power to me, I pray, so that no matter what life brings, I will overcome. And now I pray this same prayer for all your children in our church as we work to

follow your will for what you want done in this body of people,
these jars of clay. And I pray...