

MinistryPlace.net

The Sermon on the Mount , Jesus Teaches Us to Live

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-16

Theme: Jesus teaches us what it looks like to follow Him

Jr High (Ages 12-14)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

"Love Like Jesus: How to Live for God" (Matthew 5:1, 16 , The Sermon on the Mount) Imagine Jesus standing on a mountain, not just teaching rules, but sharing how to live. Think of it like a master chef giving you not just a recipe, but the secret to making something delicious and healthy. In Matthew 5, Jesus flips the script on what it means to follow Him. He says: "Don't just go through the motions, live in a way that reflects who God is." For example, when He teaches about being "perfect" (Matthew 5:48), He's not saying we'll never mess up, He's telling us to keep aiming higher. Life's tough, but His Word gives us a blueprint: Love your enemies. Give without expecting anything back. Let your light shine so others see God in you. Why it matters: This isn't just about Sunday mornings, it's how you handle arguments with friends, how you treat the least of these (or even the most annoying person), and how you stand for what's right when it's hard. Jesus didn't give us these commands to make us feel guilty; He gave them so we could flourish in love and freedom. Life application: Start small. Today, ask God to help you choose to do one thing He's taught us, like forgiving someone or speaking kind words, just because He wants us to. Because when we live like this, we're not just following a rule... we're becoming the kind of people who make His kingdom look beautiful. --- Encouragement for teachers: Keep it relatable! Use stories (even personal ones), let them debate, and end with a challenge like: "What's one 'mountain' you're facing this week? How can Jesus help you climb it?" Optional reflection: children can draw a picture of Jesus helping their friends, then share one way they can help someone else this week. This extra activity supports the lesson's theme and gives teachers a simple, lowprep option for extending the discussion.

Bible Story

"The Mountain Talk: How Jesus Changed Everything" (Matthew 5:1-16)

Imagine a crowd of people, maybe farmers, fishermen, and outcasts, gathered on a hillside near Galilee, their eyes glued to a man standing on the edge of the crowd. That man wasn't just any teacher; he was Jesus, who had already done miraculous things like walking on water and healing the sick. But today, something different happened. Instead of telling them about miracles, he started talking about how to live. Not rules for how to earn God's love, but how to be loved by him. The crowd gasped. They'd heard about love before, maybe in the Old Testament, but Jesus flipped it. "You've heard that 'Love your neighbor.' But I tell you..." His words cut through their expectations, and suddenly, everything felt bigger than they'd imagined.

Jesus didn't just preach love; he showed it. He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3), which meant they didn't have to be perfect to be loved by God. Then he got real: "Blessed are those who mourn" (5:4), not because they were sad, but because they felt the weight of sin and wanted to fix it. He even called out hypocrites: "You think you're righteous because you fast and pray, but your hearts are far from God" (5:13-16). He didn't flinch. He didn't sugarcoat. This wasn't about guilt, it was about truth. Jesus didn't say, "Don't feel bad about your mistakes," but "Here's how to be honest with God and others." Some in the crowd muttered, "Who does this guy think he is?" But others nodded, realizing he wasn't making them feel worse, he was giving them a new way to live.

Here's the crazy part: Jesus didn't give them a checklist. He said, "You are the light of the world" (5:14). Not when you're perfect, but now, even in the mess. He told them to let their good deeds shine like lamps, not to hide them. And the thing that stuck with me? He said, "Let your light shine before others" (5:16), not "Wait until you're famous." That meant getting up early to help neighbors, not just when it was trendy. It meant being kind to people who ignored you, not just those who treated you well. Jesus wasn't asking for perfection, he was offering a lifetime invitation. His words weren't about rules; they were about love in action.

This lesson still blows my mind today. We all mess up, sometimes we even want to mess up because it's easier to be hard on others than hard on ourselves. But Jesus didn't just say, "Don't sin," he said, "Be light." That's not easy, but it's freeing. When I struggle with being kind or forgiving, I remember this: Jesus didn't say, "Be perfect," he said, "Be real." And he walked that talk. He loved even when it cost him everything. So why not start small? Today, maybe you'll choose to be kind to someone who's hard on you. Maybe you'll speak up for someone who's ignored. Jesus didn't tell us to do it perfectly, he told us to start.

Why does this matter? Because Jesus didn't just teach us what to do; he showed us who we are. We're not just followers, we're light-bearers. The world needs people who live by love, not just words. When we let our light shine, we're not just doing good things; we're declaring, "This is how God sees me." And that's why this story still matters today, because Jesus didn't just walk on water; he walked into our messy, broken world and said, "I'm here to fix it." So let's take his words and make them ours, not just today, but every day.

Key Verse

Matthew 5:14 , 'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.'

Here's a fun, relatable breakdown of Matthew 5:14 for junior high students: --- "Imagine you're a kid shining a flashlight in a dark room. That light helps everyone see where to walk, it doesn't hide itself, it shows the way!" Jesus says we're like that flashlight, our lives aren't supposed to be sneaky or hidden. Instead, our faith, kindness, and choices should shine bright in the world, making others want to follow God too. It's not about being perfect (we're all messier than a flashlight!), but about being real, so others can see God's love through us. Life application: How can you make your choices so good that even your friends notice God's light in you? --- Real question answered: "But what if no one notices me?" The answer? You don't have to be the only light, just one who shines bright enough so others see a little extra goodness. And sometimes that's just showing up, being kind, or sharing God's truth in a way that feels true to you.

Activities

Activity 1:

1. Introduce the Lesson (3 min):
2. Start by reading Matthew 5:13, 16 ("You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world").
3. Ask: "How can we be 'salt', preserving hope, or 'light', bringing truth and joy, even when life gets messy?"
4. Briefly explain that Jesus is teaching us to live differently, not just in church but in school, friendships, and challenges.
5. Design Phase (7 min):
6. Distribute cardstock and supplies. Students write a short prayer or promise on the front of their card (e.g., "Today, I will share kindness like salt" or "I'll stand up for truth like a light").
7. On the back, they draw one visual representation of how they'll live out the Beatitudes (e.g., a heart for compassion, a flame for boldness).
8. Encourage them to use bold colors or doodles to make it personal.
9. Share & Reflect (5 min):
10. Have students swap cards and share one thing they learned or a challenge they're facing in living out Jesus' teachings.
11. Discuss: "What's one way you'll use your card to remind yourself this week?"
12. LIFE APPLICATION:
13. This activity connects the Sermon on the Mount to daily struggles (e.g., bullying, laziness, hypocrisy) by turning abstract teachings into actionable commitments. Students leave with a tangible reminder of their calling.

Activity 2:

1. Preview the Beatitudes (3 min):
2. Read aloud Matthew 5:3, 12 and pause after each Beatitude.
3. Ask: "What's one way this teaching could apply to you this week?" (e.g., "Being 'poor in spirit' might mean admitting when I'm wrong").
4. Clarify: "These aren't just 'good feelings', they're promises from God for how to live."
5. Set Up the Game (2 min):
6. Divide students into teams. Each team gets a bingo card.
7. Explain: "When you hear a Beatitude that matches a challenge, shout 'BINGO!'" (e.g., "Team, 'Blessed are the persecuted' matches when I'm teased for standing up for a friend").
8. Play (5, 10 min):
9. Read the Beatitudes aloud twice (or project them) and pause between each.
10. Teams shout when they spot a match. First to get a row wins!
11. Debrief: "Which challenge surprised you? How does God's promise help you in that situation?"
12. Extend the Discussion (2 min):
13. Ask: "What's one 'Beatitude moment' you experienced this week (even small)? How did it change you?"
14. Tie to Matthew 5:14, 16: "How can you 'shine' in a world that might not believe?"
15. LIFE APPLICATION:
16. This game humanizes the Sermon on the Mount by showing how the Beatitudes aren't abstract, they're tools for navigating school drama, peer pressure, and self-doubt. Students leave with a reminder that Jesus' teachings are for every season of life.
17. Bonus Tip: For both activities, end with a prayer challenge, e.g., "Close your card and pray: 'God, help me to be salt and light today.' Then write one way you'll try this tomorrow." This ties the lesson to their daily routines!

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions designed to spark meaningful reflection on The Sermon on the Mount while encouraging students to connect Jesus' teachings to their own lives:
- 1. The Beatitudes: What's Really Happening When Jesus Blesses the "Poor in Spirit"?
 - Jesus starts His teaching by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Some people might think this means being miserable or giving up everything. But what really is Jesus inviting us to in this phrase? How can you practice being "poor in spirit" in a way that doesn't make you feel empty, but instead opens you up to God's love? Think about a time you felt really close to God or truly honest with yourself, what did that look like?
 - (Life Application: How can you "unclothe" your pride or expectations and let God do the heavy lifting in your heart?)
- 2. The "Salt and Light" Challenge: Why Should We Let Our Light Shine Even If We're Not Perfect?
 - Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world." What does that mean for someone who might feel like they'll never live up to God's standards? If you're a bully, a gossip, or someone who struggles with anger, how does Jesus' teaching call you to be better without making you feel guilty? Think of a time someone was kind to you in spite of their flaws, what did that teach you about grace?
 - (Life Application: How can you be a "good enough" light in someone's life today, even on a tough day?)
- 3. The "Righteousness of the Gentiles" Question: What Does Jesus Mean by "More Than the Law"?
 - Jesus says, "Unless your righteousness is greater than the righteousness of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law..." Many people today are great at following rules but not at loving others, so what does it really mean to be "more than the law"? Think about something the Pharisees obsessed over (like rules about washing hands) and imagine how Jesus might challenge that in your life. How can you stretch yourself beyond what feels comfortable to live in a way that reflects God's heart?
 - (Life Application: What's one small way you can "go the extra mile" this week to show kindness or forgiveness?)
- 4. The "Hide It Under a Bushel" Warning: Why Should We Share What We've Been Given?
 - Jesus warns, "Do not hide your light under a bushel... instead, let it shine before others." What does it really cost to share our gifts, talents, or even our time? Some people might worry that giving too much will make them feel used or that others won't appreciate them. But what if, instead, sharing made them happier? Think about something you're good at (music, art, sports, helping others), how can you use it to make someone's day brighter, even if it doesn't always feel "rewarded"?
 - (Life Application: What's one thing you've been keeping to yourself that God might want you to share?)
- These questions encourage students to wrestle with Scripture and their own hearts while asking big, practical questions. Would you like any adjusted to fit a specific group's maturity level or interests?

Prayer Focus

Prayer Focus for Junior High Students: "Lord Jesus, today we're diving into Your big, beautiful teachings, like how You tell us to be 'salt and light' in the world. We know You're not just talking about rules, but about real life, when we get tired, when people hurt us, or when we want to fit in but really want to stand out for You. Help us to listen to Your words and live them out in ways that make our hearts (and our choices) shine, even when it's hard. Give us courage to be honest with You, to be kind to others, and to trust that You're with us always, even when the world feels messy. Amen." --- Why this works: - Relatable: Connects to their real struggles (e.g., fitting in vs. standing out, tiredness, hurt). - Hopeful: Ends with trust in Jesus, like the "light" part of Matthew 5:14. - Engaging: Uses "you" to feel like a conversation, not just a prayer script. - Life-applicable: Ties back to the lesson's core: choosing God's way in daily moments. Teacher tip: Pause after the second sentence to ask: "What's one thing from today's lesson that's making you curious or worried?" Then pray over their thoughts.

>> Missions Spotlight

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches about being 'salt and light.' In many parts of Africa, salt is extremely valuable and light is precious in areas without electricity. Missioners in sub-Saharan Africa find these metaphors come alive in powerful ways.

-> To the Cross

Jesus said, 'You are the light of the world.' But we can't shine on our own. It's only because Jesus , the Light of the World , lives in us that we can shine. And He could only be our light because He went to the cross to remove our darkness.