

Jesus Is Invading Our Culture

It is our culture which silently shapes our ideas, our values, and our patterns for “doing life.” It’s a little bit like breathing colorless ozone: you don’t even know it’s happening. But it is. Just as your lungs feel the effects of what you breathe, so also your attitudes and desires feel the impact of whatever is currently marketed by your society.

What is culture? Where did it come from? How does it wield such influence?

You do not get to select your needs. You were created to need oxygen, water, food, sleep, shelter, love, acceptance, meaning, work, values, boundaries, rewards, purpose, security, friends, family, community, recreation, etc. It is our culture that organizes life with the unspoken promise of meeting your needs without having to involve God.

Cain murdered his younger brother and resisted God’s sentence to wander by building the first city in defiance. Men and women sought refuge in that place where they would not have to depend upon their Creator, and there arose the first society, the first culture. It was not a loving, happy world that they produced.

We have an American culture, which is distinct from the Japanese or Romanian version; and although they differ significantly, they are built on similar principles of pride, fear, revenge, lust, and selfishness.

Our American culture is further diffused into the sub-cultures of the academic world, the military world, the world of sports or music or business or drugs; and even these splinter off into many little pockets of how life is seen and practiced.

One thing is certain: everyone lives in a culture, and it is not neutral toward God.

It is our culture that Jesus invaded. He brought the original culture for which we were created: the culture of heaven, and it has a King! He called it, “the Kingdom of heaven.” It is built on the principles that are determined by the character of God; and it forms a counter-culture, radically different from any other.

Jesus demonstrated this alternative culture and preached, “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matthew 4:17) The Greek is better translated, “Be constantly changing your minds, because the Kingdom of heaven is here.”

He introduced you to a lifestyle of changing your mind as you learn to live in His Kingdom.

Lesson 1

The Bible calls the culture that has influenced your life, the “world” or the “world-system,” because it is truly a system.

It is this system that defines the roles of husbands and wives. It is this system that establishes what is most respected and rewarded; and it is this system that clamors for your allegiance.

There is a fierce war being fought between your culture and the Kingdom of heaven, so it is impossible to be neutral.

Scripture Study: Read 2 Corinthians 4:4. (*5 minutes*)

Who is called, “the god of this world”? _____

What do you think this implies as far as Satan’s relationship to your culture?

Scripture Study: Jesus calls Satan, the “ruler of this world.” (*5 minutes*)

John 12:31 - Practically speaking, what do you think this means? _____

John 14:30 - What do you think Jesus meant by, “he has nothing in Me”?

When Satan comes to you, what is he hoping to find in you that he did not find in Jesus?

Thought Question: (*5 minutes*)

As you read and reflect upon what God says about your culture and the devil, what might the Lord be saying to you? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Declare your allegiance to Jesus Christ as your Sovereign.

Trust Him to download His view of your life situations.

Pray His will over the challenges that face you.

Praise Him for His faithfulness to you in every circumstance.

Lesson 2

Your culture is the darkness. It isn't just the "bad" things, the things you want to keep away from your children that are the enemy; it is the entire "system" that spreads its tentacles out to practice "thought control" over your life that is evil.

We all grew up in a system that taught us ways of thinking and responding that contradict the ways of God. Only as you examine the assumptions around you can you begin to realize your need for His light.

You may well have this question: "How can I figure this out?" The answer is simple. Choose the light (God's values and attitudes) over and against the ways of darkness, whether you encounter darkness inside yourself or in society. Choose life!

Scripture Study: Read John 3:19. (*5 minutes*)

If the culture that surrounds you and influences you is created by the darkness, try to rewrite John 3:19 using your own words to include this understanding of darkness.

Scripture Study: Read John 1:4-5. (*10 minutes*)

If the "light" spoken of here is the very nature of God and therefore the way of heaven, use this understanding to rewrite John 1:4-5 in your own words.

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Thank God for bringing His light into your darkness!

Spend time adoring Him!

Receive His will into your mind and heart.

Pray for His Kingdom to come into your surroundings.

Lesson 3

The devil showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world and claimed that the authority and glory of these kingdoms belonged to him. The question is, what were these kingdoms that the devil showed Jesus: were they Italy, Germany, Greece, Turkey, etc.?

The Greek for “nations” is “ethos” which refers not to geographic borders but to ethnic groups, family groups, to those bound together by a common language or culture. The devil has cleverly ruled his various kingdoms or nations by controlling people through their various cultures. The devil was boasting of his systems, for they are sin-based. This, then, is his realm of authority and glory.

Scripture Study: Read Luke 4:5-8. (15 minutes)

What insights do you gain by reading carefully the presentation made by the devil?

Do you agree with labeling our various cultures “the darkness”? _____ Why do you agree or disagree? _____

The Church has made opposite mistakes by either withdrawing into a sub-culture of its own or by so identifying with the surrounding culture that the light of the radical Kingdom of heaven is lost. What has been your personal tendency in regard to this dichotomy?

If the culture into which you were born is the darkness, how are you to use your authority over the devil? _____

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Praise Jesus Christ as your Ruler!

Pray, “Thy Kingdom come” over all the situations of your life!

Use your authority to release those who are bound by the devil.

Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and ears to His Kingdom today.

Lesson 4

Jesus officially announced the in-breaking of the Kingdom of heaven when He stood in His hometown synagogue and read Isaiah 61:1, which is recorded in Luke 4:18. He came to bring good news to those who were spiritually poor, captive, blind, and oppressed.

Jesus' target was of a spiritual nature, because the slavery and bondage was primarily of a spiritual nature. Everyone is spiritually blind until the Spirit opens their eyes.

Do you see yourself in this group? Of course at one level you were in this group past tense; but it is important that you continue to see yourself in Jesus' target group so that you can, "be constantly changing your mind" and receiving increasing freedom.

Scripture Study: Read Luke 4:18. *(10 minutes)*

Applying these four descriptions to your life, how do you experience being:
spiritually poor? _____

a spiritual captive? _____

spiritually blind? _____

oppressed? _____

Journal: How are you experiencing the power and freedom of Christ's Kingdom grace and life in these areas of your life in an ongoing way? *(5 minutes)*

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Submit your life afresh to Jesus Christ.

Use the faith He gave you to draw from Him the grace you need today.

Use your authority to command the devil to flee from you!

Worship Jesus as the rightful King and Lord of the Universe!

Lesson 5

Jesus described Himself as the light of the world. Question: What does this really mean? Until you have asked yourself this question and searched for the answer, the real impact of this life-changing statement will probably not radically transform your heart and mind.

Jesus is the light, meaning that He treasures God the Father, loves the Father, knows the Father, understands the Father, and obeys the Father. For this reason, He displays the nature of God, which is the light.

Jesus' entire message concerned The Father and His Kingdom; and He said that everyone who followed Him would also become "the Light of life." (John 8:12)

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 4:16. (*5 minutes*)

Why do you think this verse describes the people to whom Jesus came in this way?

How is Jesus described in this verse? _____

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:14. (*5 minutes*)

Who is Jesus describing here as the light of the world? _____

What makes people light? To answer this question, consider the context.

Scripture Study: Read John 8:12. (*5 minutes*)

What is it about our following Jesus that makes us the light of life? _____

What happens when someone believes he/she is a Christian, but he/she is not revealing the light of life? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Answer this question before the Lord: "Is God the most important thing in my life?"

Tell the Lord that He is your treasure.

Surrender to Christ your mind so He can change it.

Thank Jesus for making you His follower.

Lesson 6

As your culture defines who you are and shapes how you think and behave in ways that do not honor God as God, it is darkness.

The Holy Spirit breaks into your darkness by giving you the ability to recognize who Jesus is so as to trust Him. Light shines into your darkness, and you are set upon the path of life-giving freedom!

As a disciple, you are a lifetime learner. You have a call from God to see the darkness that lurks inside so that you can choose the light. It is in your choosing rightly that you become the light for others.

Scripture Study: Read the passage of Matthew 5:3-14 starting at the end and working backwards. (*15 minutes*)

What do you think Jesus is saying that makes us collectively the light of the world?

Why do you think Jesus also calls us “salt”? _____

Obviously “salt” and “light” are word pictures. What is it in this passage that so changes a people that Jesus can describe this people as both salt and light?

How does this light differ from the darkness of your culture? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Begin by choosing the ways of blessing inside your own heart.

Ask the Holy Spirit to apply Jesus’ words to your habits and patterns.

Honor God as the most glorious of all Persons!

Thank Him for bringing His light into your darkness.

Lesson 7

Jesus proclaimed the presence of God's Kingdom and demonstrated this reality by healing the sick and casting out demons. (Matthew 4:23-24)

Then He gathered the people and began to teach them about the differences between their society and the counter-culture of the Kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:1-2)

The very first principle, when applied, will transform any person, any group, any society. Don't you imagine that Jesus had a good reason for beginning with this principle?

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:3. (*15 minutes*)

What does it mean to think of yourself as spiritually poor? _____

What character trait is Jesus describing? _____

What is the opposite of this character trait? _____

How do you see this opposite character trait working in the society around you?

What does Jesus promise to give us when we cultivate being poor in spirit?

Why do you think the Kingdom of heaven works this way? _____

What do you sense is the application of this principle to your life today?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Humble yourself before God this a.m.

Draw close to your heavenly Father based on Christ's achievements.

Just spend some quiet moments with Him.

Ask Jesus to teach you about the Kingdom.

Lesson 8

How would you summarize Jesus' message? Matthew 4:17 probably says it best: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The question is, "What does this really mean?" The word, "repent," is in the Greek present imperative and is best translated as, "Be constantly changing your mind."

Jesus invites people to a lifestyle of constantly changing their minds about their values, attitudes, goals, motives, actions, and words so that the way heaven operates will become part of all that we do.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 4:17. (*5 minutes*)

How does translating, "repent," as to be constantly changing your mind change your personal understanding of what Jesus preached? _____

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 4:16-17. (*10 minutes*)

If your culture is the darkness, what is the light? _____

If you awaken in a perfectly dark bedroom and try to move about, what is likely to happen to you? _____

So, what is God telling us about the darkness? _____

Now, in terms of Matthew 4:16 in which Matthew has described all people as sitting in the darkness with a great light appearing, try putting Matthew 4:17 in your own words so as to put Jesus' thoughts into your own setting.

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Come to Jesus as your Light this a.m.

Invite Him to turn the lights on inside your heart and mind.

Ask Him to deliver you from the darkness.

Pray for your co-workers that they may receive Christ's light.

Lesson 9

Jesus describes His eight Kingdom principles in terms of what is blessed as opposed to what is cursed. If you remember, Israel stood on twin peaks declaring the blessings of doing life God's way versus the resulting curses which come on those who decide that God isn't to be taken seriously.

Ask yourself this question: "What would happen to my society if everyone who experienced pain, rejection, hurt or anything that produced a sadness, were to then experience the comfort of God Himself?" What would change in your culture?

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:4. (15 minutes)

What is Jesus promising here? _____

It is important to realize that the promised comfort is not automatic. No, you must come to God personally and let Him comfort you. Here He promises to give you the comfort when you come.

Have you ever known a child or perhaps even an adult who would not allow him/herself to be comforted? _____ When a person will not receive the offered comfort, how does he usually behave? _____

In your opinion, why would a man or woman not allow him/herself to be comforted?

If you always came quickly to God as your Father and received His comfort, how would your life change? _____

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Use Matthew 5:3 to come to God.

Let Him comfort you wherever you are disappointed or feeling damaged.

Sit with Him and soak up His love for you.

Worship Him!

Lesson 10

A strong-willed child is probably going to have to learn things the hard way and this process can be costly.

God has selected a wonderful heritage for you; but in order to possess it, you must follow Him into it.

God breaks the will of those He loves, for it enables them to enter into the “land” chosen for them. Joseph. David. Jacob. Peter. Moses. Jesus delighted in His Father’s will.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:5. (*15 minutes*)

If your translation uses the word, “gentle,” substitute the word, “meek”; and you will get the idea. The meek man is not always gentle, and the gentle person is not always meek. Describe what you think meekness looks like in a person. _____

What is the character quality that is the opposite of meekness? _____

Was Jesus meek? _____ How was this blessing evidenced in His life?

What is the promise offered to those who are meek? _____

Use your own words to rewrite this verse as it might be applied to your life.

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Humble yourself before God this a.m.

Come to Him for His comfort.

Yield your will to Him so He can teach, guide, and correct you.

Express to Him how much you trust Him.

Lesson 11

Success. What spells success in your culture?

Whoever gets to define success (your culture assumes this role) tells you what is most important in life and rewards those who obtain it. Even those who cannot “succeed” in these terms, wish they could; and they usually applaud those who “make it.”

There is only one definition of success given by our Creator: the possessing of the same character qualities as God. Righteousness is the word that describes the many aspects of God’s character: His purity, His wisdom, His courage, His patience, His faithfulness, His love, His humility, His compassion, His truthfulness, etc.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:6. (*10 minutes*)

Why do you think Jesus chose to couch this principle in terms of your hunger and thirst?

For what does your society tell you to “hunger and thirst”? _____

What does your society promise you if you do hunger and thirst for that which they say is most important? _____

Why do you think Jesus could promise you satisfaction if you hunger and thirst for righteousness? _____

Scripture Study: Read Romans 1:16-17. (*5 minutes*)

How is righteousness to be obtained on a routine basis? _____

Finish this sentence: “If the most important thing to me is having God’s character,

_____.”

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Come to Christ this a.m.

Exchange your lack of God’s character for Christ’s righteousness.

Spend a moment relishing His gift to you.

Worship Him. Adore Him. Honor Him!

Lesson 12

We live in a wonderful world created by God to express things about Himself! There is so much beauty here: the trees, mountains, birds, streams, the rolling hills, the gorgeous sunsets along a rocky coast!

But when we look at the wounds that people bear and then listen to the words that come from so many mouths, we glimpse the devastating effects of the curses which have been spoken.

What are the natural responses of a child to any provocation or blocking of his will? Every society attempts to harness these responses, but man cannot change the heart of man. Only God can change us from curses to blessings.

Scripture Study: Re-examine Matthew 5:3-6. (*15 minutes*)

Jesus is the one who defines how we should live. Some ways are blessed while the opposite ways are cursed.

In your own words, state the four attitudes that are blessed. _____

Now state the opposite of these four blessed attitudes. Try stating them with the formula, "Cursed are _____, for _____."

Comment on what you see in your society in terms of what they pronounce as desirable and whether it is darkness or light. _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Thank Jesus for bearing the Curses and giving you the Blessings!

Renounce any habit patterns of darkness you see in your life.

By faith receive Christ as your righteousness and light.

Pray for His Kingdom to come into the culture around you.

Lesson 13

God is just, and He has created us with a keen desire for justice inasmuch as we can discern it.

Mercy can only function in the context of justice. Fortunately God is both just and merciful, and He perfectly demonstrated the two qualities at the Cross.

Since we have so received His mercy, He blesses us when we likewise extend mercy to those who have sinned against us.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:7. (*5 minutes*)

Does extending mercy mean that you shouldn't take a stand against what is sinful? Explain.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 18:23-35. (*10 minutes*)

Reread Matthew 18:33. What is it that Jesus wanted in the heart of this servant?

What is the attitude of heart in this servant that Jesus revealed as the darkness?

In this sense, why do you think Jesus describes mercy as light? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Come to the Cross and receive His mercy today.

Visualize your sins being placed on Jesus.

Say in your heart, "Those who have wronged me, I say, you do not owe me. I forgive you for Christ's sake."

Determine to live in the light.

Lesson 14

What would happen to the culture around you if suddenly everyone had truly pure motives?

Heaven will be like this.

Everyone would be willing to become transparent. Every word spoken would come from a pure source that would make us all safe with one another.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:8. *(15 minutes)*

What does God have to do for you in order to bring you into the blessing of having a pure heart? _____

Why do you think that purity of heart is freedom? _____

How would you need to change your thinking to experience this blessing?

When people have purity of heart, what are some of the things they do not do? (E.G.: manipulate) What are some other examples? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Bring any impurity of heart into God's light.

Ask for the blood of Jesus to cleanse your heart.

By faith draw upon Jesus' purity for your heart.

Pray for those around you who are trapped in the darkness.

Lesson 15

How would your world change if everyone were suddenly converted into being a peacemaker?

Heaven is like that.

A peacemaker is not one who makes moral compromises. No, he seeks to reconcile men to God and people to people.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:9. (15 minutes)

What are some of the ways our society works that do not promote peace?

What are some things Christians sometimes do which hinder peace?

Do you think that Christians sometimes bring curses upon themselves by choosing the darkness instead of the light? Comment. _____

What is God teaching you about being a peacemaker? _____

In order for you to be a peacemaker, what attitudes need to change? _____

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Draw close to Christ as your Peacemaker.

Ask Him to forgive you for attitudes that are sinful and not those of a peacemaker.

Receive Jesus into your heart as the One who is changing you.

Pray for Heaven's Kingdom to rule where you live.

Lesson 16

Originally created for the light, we were born in the darkness. (John 3:19) If it weren't for the very words of God, we would not be able to tell which choices lead to life and which choices deceive us.

Nowhere is this more apparent than when suffering is involved.

Choosing the light when pain is the price is often the surprising path to freedom; and it is in our choosing that the light shines!

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:10-12. *(15 minutes)*

Rewrite these verses using your own words. _____

What happens when you stand for righteousness in a situation and, as a result, someone reacts and says very ugly things to you and about you, and yet you choose to rejoice?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Ask God for courage to choose His ways.

Thank Jesus for showing you the light.

Receive His grace to rejoice in your situations.

Pray for God's glory to be revealed in your life.

Lesson 17

These eight principles define the counter-culture that heaven creates here on earth; and those who follow them discover that they are in a position to help others who do not yet recognize the source of their sorrows: i.e. their disobedience.

Fortunately, not everything about your culture is evil. In fact, you will often see some things that are admirable; and for this we are grateful.

Nevertheless, Satan deceives people through his systems of various cultural practices, which are built upon principles that contradict God.

Scripture Study: Read Mark 7:6-13. (*15 minutes*)

Here is my present tense recasting of Mark 7:6-7. It is popular today to claim spirituality while rejecting God's commands. Thus our culture creates politically correct "traditions" which supplant God's principles.

Try your hand at saying something which reflects Mark 7:6-7. _____

If "the tradition of men" can be understood to be that which our society believes is true but that contradicts what God says is blessed, what are some of the things which you are hearing advocated by your culture which do not agree with God's commandments? (Mark 7:8-13 -- E.G.: couples should live together before marrying to see if it works)

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Thank God for giving you His commandments!

Embrace the wisdom of God for your life.

Ask God to give those around you revelation of Himself!

Pray for His Kingdom to come on earth!

Lesson 18

There is serious confusion that takes a huge toll upon Christians: they misunderstand the law.

It is true that we are not saved by keeping the law. It is also true that Jesus did keep the law perfectly.

We are only righteous by faith in Jesus; but the law still defines love while the grace of God empowers us to live in the freedom described by the commandments. Thus it is His law working in our hearts that internalizes the ways of heaven.

Scripture Study: Read this fascinating passage of Matthew 5:17-20. (*10 minutes*)
Why do you think Jesus would say, "Do not think"? _____

Why must our righteousness surpass that of the Pharisees? _____

Scripture Study: Compare Matthew 6:1-2 with Matthew 5:16. (*5 minutes*)

In one situation, Jesus warns against letting your righteous acts be seen while in the other He wants our good works to be noticed.

What is the difference in the two situations that explains why He directs one set of people one way and others another way? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Ask God to give you His grace to choose the light.

Ask God to help those around you to give Him the credit.

Thank God for giving you His commandments.

Receive afresh Christ's righteousness by faith.

Lesson 19

Christianity is a religion of the heart and the mind. It is based upon the authority of an historical person, Jesus Christ, who was proven to be God by His resurrection from the dead.

With authority, Jesus tackled a number of common problems in which the darkness deceives men and brings curses upon them.

By doing this, Jesus made it clear that there is nothing wrong with the law or commandments of God, but the obedience that is blessed comes from the attitudes and choices of the heart.

Scripture Study: Skim read Matthew 5:21-48 and Matthew 6:19-34. (*15 minutes*)
Describe the problem Jesus addressed in Matthew 5:21-22 with one word.

What is the problem Jesus addressed in Matthew 5:23-24? _____

Describe the problem Jesus addressed in Matthew 5:27-28 with one word.

Describe the problem Jesus addressed in Matthew 5:31-32 with one word.

Describe the problem Jesus addressed in Matthew 5:33-37 with one word.

What is the problem Jesus addressed in Matthew 5:38-42? (You will need more than one word.) _____

Similarly state the problem Jesus addressed in Matthew 5:43-44.

In Matthew 6:25, what problem does Jesus address? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

If you see a need for forgiveness, ask for it.

Look to Jesus Himself for your deliverance.

Thank Jesus for being your Shepherd.

Pray for His Kingdom to come.

Lesson 20

Why did Jesus start this section with the problem of man's anger? Probably to ask the question is enough to provoke the answer. All humans experience anger, and there is probably not a single emotion that produces more sin than anger. The possible exception is fear, which often lies behind our anger.

Almost any word that has damaged you was probably sparked by anger.

We experience anger when our wills are crossed, when our expectations are not met, when someone violates us in some way, or when someone takes something from us which is not theirs to take. And we may experience anger on behalf of another.

Scripture Study: Ephesians 4:26-27. (10 minutes)

Why do you think Paul expresses his admonition regarding anger in this way: "Be angry, and yet do not sin"? _____

What would you think if Paul had said, "Never get angry"? _____

What do you think Paul is getting at when he uses the expression, "do not let the sun go down on your anger"? _____

Ephesians 4:27 is better translated, "do not give the devil a place." What is Paul warning us will happen when we give ourselves permission to remain angry?

Why would Paul think that remaining angry would grant the devil the right to occupy a place in our lives simply by our allowing anger to reside? _____

There is a problem here. Almost every time that we are angry, we feel we have a right to be angry. In fact, we may even feel it would be wrong for us to not feel angry. What do you think both Paul and Jesus would say to us about our anger?

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

If you have given anger room in your soul, renounce it!

Ask forgiveness for your anger.

Renounce the devil from any place in your life.

Ask Jesus to teach you how to recognize and deal with your anger.

Lesson 21

We are probably quicker to recognize frustration in our lives than anger, but one is just more intense than the other.

Part of a growing maturity is our ability to quickly become aware of our emotions and what they are telling us.

Another part of maturity is an increasing desire for wisdom and a joy in discovering how to change.

Scripture Study: Examine the following gems of wisdom. *(15 minutes)*

Proverbs 14:29. Personalize this verse by speaking to yourself from this verse.

Proverbs 16:32. Why do you think this is true? _____

Proverbs 19:19. What happens when we don't learn and change? _____

James 1:19b-20. What do you think God is saying to you? _____

When you get angry, what do you intend to do now that you have reviewed God's commands? This is the bottom line, isn't it? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Renounce any sense that you have the right to remain angry.

Take authority over any demonic influence that may have come.

Renounce any generational curse of anger.

Thank God for showing you a way to more freedom.

Lesson 22

What would happen to people if anger were somehow “magically” removed? Let your imagination walk through human hearts, through families, through the business world, etc. Hospitals would have more empty beds. The entire justice “industry” would relax.

There is an anger that has been purged of all human flesh, which is righteous. Such anger does not sin but instead grieves with God.

There will be no angry words in heaven. None of the “unwholesome words” Paul mentioned in Ephesians 4:29 which carry the poison of bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice have any place in the Kingdom of heaven, which has come in part on earth.

Scripture Study: Read Ephesians 4:26-31. (*15 minutes*)

When you allow anger to simmer in a low level way while you carry on with life, what toll do you think it takes on you? _____

Do you think you have anger lurking beneath the surface in your soul at this time?

What causes you to draw this conclusion? _____

What effect do you think unwholesome words are having upon your life (meaning words spoken by you, for these are the only ones you can control)?

How do you think the devil takes advantage of you with respect to your anger?

Do you feel motivated at this time to take a stand against the sins caused by anger?

Comment. _____

Prayer Time: (*15 –30 minutes*)

Lay your soul at the feet of your Savior.

Welcome His sacrifice to cleanse you from unwholesome words.

Receive His grace to overcome habits that lead to sin.

Worship Him for giving you His freedom!

Lesson 23

What would happen if Christians refused to worship on Sunday mornings until they had done everything in their power to reconcile damaged relationships?

I wonder if the Holy Spirit's presence might become so strong that revival would break out in our midst, and powerful effects would be felt by non-Christians?

Obviously in heaven there will be no offenses, and the worship will be free and pure. For this reason the Kingdom of heaven moves us to do all within our ability to clear up every breach, every misunderstanding that divides and separates us.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:23-24. *(15 minutes)*

Do you think Christians today take this commandment of Jesus seriously?

How large a problem do you think this is? Comment. _____

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. When Christians tolerate broken relationships, what do you think happens to the power of the spiritual light that penetrates the darkness?

Read Romans 12:18. What does this mean to you? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Ask forgiveness for any disobedience to this command.

By faith, receive the commission to be a peacemaker.

Ask Jesus for His love for those who trouble you.

Pray for His Kingdom authority to rule in your relationships.

Lesson 24

God created us as sexual beings, and sexual fulfillment within the covenant of marriage is His idea. In fact, the love of a husband for his wife is a powerful prophetic picture of Christ and His bride!

Satan targets our sexual capacities in order to ruin the beauty, purity, and power of what God has given us.

Pornography and immodesty are two of Satan's most effective traps. Jesus' love has motivated Him to shepherd us away from the defilement of sin and into the choicest blessings of God.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:27-28. *(15 minutes)*

What does the society around you think about sexual lust? _____

How do you think pornography affects those who indulge in it? _____

What do you think motivates those who dress and act in ways that encourage others to lust?

In dealing with the sin of adultery, why do you think Jesus raised this issue of lust?

How serious an issue do you think this is with Jesus? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Surrender your sexual capacities to God.

If there is any need for repentance, then do so.

Ask the Lord to teach you how to honor Him in this area of your life.

Pray God's Kingdom into your life situations.

Lesson 25

God hates divorce. No wonder. Disloyalty, broken vows, broken hearts, unforgiveness, bitterness, disappointment, loss of history, damaged children. How opposite to all that God intended for the happiness and well-being of His children is divorce.

Unfortunately our society has developed a culture in which divorce is approved and, in many cases, even expected.

Commitment to the marriage covenant is the cornerstone of stability in any society; and many are the consequences to any nation that violates this fundamental commandment.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:31-32. (15 minutes)

Why do you think Jesus made adultery an exception for granting a divorce?

If God hates divorce, what do you think He wants our attitude to be toward divorce?

What do you think are the advantages to having God's attitude toward divorce?

How well do you think the American Church is doing in obeying Jesus' command with regard to divorce? _____

How can you impart a high view of marriage to your children? _____

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Ask God to remove any curse of divorce that may have affected your family.

Pray for the marriages in your family line.

Ask God to give the people in your life a fresh sense of the fear of the Lord.

Pray for His Kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth.

Lesson 26

Living in the light requires truthfulness at all times, but this is not merely blurting out whatever you happen to be thinking at the moment. Truthfulness means you do not deceive. Your word can be trusted. You swear to your own hurt, which means you will not hide from potential embarrassment by speaking only part of the truth.

Jesus addresses some of the ways that are culturally acceptable by which men give themselves permission to not live up to their word.

Liars do not have God's character, and they are excluded from His heaven.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:33-37. *(15 minutes)*

Since both Jesus and Paul did make oaths, what do you think Jesus is trying to communicate in this passage? _____

Read John 8:44. When a man lies, what do you think happens to him should he not thoroughly and quickly repent? _____

Read 1 Timothy 1:9-10. How serious a sin does Paul seem to consider lying? _____

Read Revelations 21:27 and 22:15. What happens to liars? _____

Comment: Corrie Ten Boom lied to the Germans regarding the Jews she was hiding; this is in another category.

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

If your conscience is defiled, come to Jesus for cleansing.

Determine before the Lord that you will only speak the truth.

Break any family curses that may exist from this sin.

Pray for the Kingdom of His Light to shine upon us!

Lesson 27

What are we to think as we read this difficult passage in Matthew 5:38-42? Apply the force of the verbs to yourself: “slaps”; “sues”; “forces”; and then “asks.” How is a citizen of the Kingdom of heaven to respond?

Even when you are treated in a most unjust way by people who should know better, Jesus is telling you: “You are to have this heart attitude: ‘you do not owe me anything.’”

This attitude describes the power of living free, and Jesus calls all His disciples to follow Him into this light!

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:38-42. (*15 minutes*)

Use your words to try to capture Jesus’ message by finishing this sentence: “When someone _____, my response will be _____.”

Scan Matthew 18:23-35. Compare the forgiven servant’s attitude in Matthew 18:30 with what Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:38-42. _____

Finish this sentence: “God created me with a keen sense of justice, but _____”

Finish this sentence: “When I maintain an inner attitude that ‘this person owes me,’ I experience _____”

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

In God’s presence, release others from owing you.

Pray God’s mercy and help upon those who have mistreated you.

Determine before the Lord to live in His freedom.

Pray for His Kingdom will to be done.

Lesson 28

What culture teaches people to love their enemies? I believe there is only one, and it is the culture of heaven.

God is love. All of His commandments describe what love does.

To love those who are not loving you is freedom.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:43-48. (*15 minutes*)

Obviously you cannot love like this in your own strength, so why do you think Jesus gives you these orders? _____

What are your resources to be able to live in this freedom? _____

Do you wish to live in this freedom? _____

What can you do that will help you experience the willingness and ability to love those who do not love you? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Visualize Christ being punished for you!

Ask for His desire to love your enemies.

By faith begin the journey toward loving your enemies.

Pray for His Kingdom light to fill your heart.

Lesson 29

Jesus identified one sin that diagnoses our hearts perhaps faster than any other. It is the sin of worry.

Before you commit a vast menu of sins, you will have probably worried first.

And what does the sin of worry reveal about your heart? It shows that something other than God Himself is, at that moment, the most important issue for you.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 6:25-34 and then quickly notice what the “For this reason” in Matthew 6:25 refers to as seen in Matthew 6:24. *(15 minutes)*

What is it that birds and flowers have that Jesus wants you to have? _____

What is the opposite of worry? _____

Read Matthew 6:32. Why do the Gentiles worry? _____

So why should the children of God not worry? _____

Why is seeking His Kingdom and His righteousness as the highest priority in your life the safeguard against the sin of worry? _____

What promise does Jesus make to you when you put His Kingdom first? _____

What do you think God wants to do in your life in regard to this passage? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Ask God to forgive you and deliver you from the sin of worry!

Choose God to be your treasure above every other thing.

Ask Jesus to teach you how to overcome the habits of worry.

Pray for His Kingdom to come.

Lesson 30

In Matthew 5:6 Jesus promises that you will always be able to experience satisfaction, but this depends upon your desire for righteousness (God's character).

Then Jesus walks you through eight areas of life so that you can see what righteousness looks like. To deeply desire (hunger and thirst) to not allow anger to cause you to sin, to do everything in your power to maintain right relationships, to overcome sexual lust, to make no room for thoughts of divorce, to always speak truthfully, to keep your heart attitude free from any sense of someone owing you something, to actively love those who do not love you, and to live by faith in God as opposed to worry: this is a recipe for peace.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:6. *(10 minutes)*

Using the above description of righteousness, try using your own words to rewrite Matthew 5:6 so that it applies to your life. _____

Examine Romans 1:17. How does God supply you with the righteousness that you need to experience a lifetime of satisfaction? _____

Read Philippians 3:9. How does Paul's solution apply to your life situations?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Before the Lord see your need for His righteousness.

Pray Matthew 5:6.

By faith receive Jesus Christ as your righteousness.

Taste the goodness of God.