

THE KINGDOM MADE PLAIN

*A Teaching Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount
and the Sermon on the Plain*

Master Syllabus & Study Foundation

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Base text: New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue)

Purpose of This Study

This is a study and a commentary built into one. Across thirty-three sessions it walks two of the most familiar and least obeyed passages in all of Scripture — the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) and the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17–49) — unit by unit, doing the careful exegetical and theological work of a commentary while remaining a usable teaching guide for a learning community. Each session stands on its own as a strong teaching unit of roughly three to four thousand words, and the sessions together form a continuous reading that may, in time, be edited into a book.

The foundation throughout is a Kingdom of God theology: the conviction that Jesus came announcing the reign of God breaking in here and now, and that the gospel frees us not simply from sin but for others. These sermons are not impossible ideals or private spiritualities. They are the constitution of a people learning to live as if God reigns — because, in Christ, God does.

Convictions That Shape Every Session

Scripture-rooted and justice-forward. We cite and apply the text plainly, and we name injustice where the text names it.

Kingdom-now. We refuse “heaven someday” framing that ignores present embodiment. The Sermon is a field manual for the reign of God on earth.

Inclusive and invitational. Never gatekeeping, never spiritually elitist. These words were given to a community and are meant to widen the circle, not police it.

Ecumenical and honest. We honor diverse traditions, read the Jewishness of Jesus with respect, and resist every partisan or nationalist conflation of faith with power.

Freedom for others. At every turn we apply the test: does this reading increase the freedom and dignity of others, especially the least among us?

How Each Session Is Built

Every session follows the same architecture so the units cohere and could later become book chapters:

1. **Kingdom Anchor.** A single thesis naming what this passage shows us about the reign of God.
2. **The Texts.** The Matthew and Luke passages set side by side in the NRSVue.
3. **The World Behind the Text.** First-century context where it changes the meaning.
4. **Commentary.** A verse-by-verse walk through the passage in a pastoral, teaching voice, in conversation with the great interpreters.

5. **Discernment Questions.** Three or four questions for personal reflection and group conversation.
6. **A Concrete Practice.** One embodied next step — personal, communal, or societal — that runs the freedom-for-others test.
7. **Video Script.** A single-presenter script of six minutes or less (roughly 800–900 spoken words) that opens the session, sets the table, and sends the learner into the written study.

The Thirty-Three Sessions

Luke's Sermon on the Plain is woven alongside Matthew throughout, so that the differences — not least Luke's blunt "blessed are you who are poor" and his four woes — stay in view rather than being smoothed away.

FRONT MATTER — TWO CRITICAL INTRODUCTIONS

Two scholarly prefaces stand ahead of Part One, to be read before Session 1. They are front matter, not numbered sessions, and leave the thirty-three-session spine intact. Each supplies a critical introduction to the Gospel that houses one of the two sermons, at a scholar's level, and carries its own footnoted citations and select bibliography.

- **An Introduction to the Gospel of Matthew** — *scholarly preface* Composition, authorship, provenance, audience, and purpose of Matthew; the synoptic problem and the five discourses; the kingdom of heaven as the Gospel's governing theme and the Sermon on the Mount as its charter.
- **An Introduction to the Gospel of Luke** — *scholarly preface* The companion preface: Luke's prologue and the two-volume Luke–Acts, authorship, date, audience, and purpose; the theology of the great reversal, the question of Luke and Israel, and the kingdom of God as present among us — the Sermon on the Plain as its charter.

PART ONE — APPROACHING THE SERMONS (FOUNDATIONS)

1. **Why These Sermons Matter** — *Matt 5:1–2; Luke 6:17–19* The Kingdom made plain; how to use this study; the posture of doers, not only hearers.
2. **The World Behind the Text** — *context* First-century Galilee under Rome — debt, day labor, and the economics Jesus' hearers actually lived.
3. **The Mountain and the Plain** — *Matt 5:1–2; Luke 6:17–20* The literary setting and theology of each sermon; Jesus as new Moses and as prophet among the people; one Lord in two portraits.
4. **What Is the Kingdom of God?** — *thematic* Basileia and the prophets; already-and-not-yet; why we insist on Kingdom-now.
5. **How the Church Has Heard This Sermon** — *history of interpretation* Augustine, the monastic counsels, Luther's two kingdoms, the Anabaptists, Tolstoy, the Social Gospel, Bonhoeffer, King — and the hermeneutic we carry forward.

PART TWO — THE BLESSING OF THE KINGDOM (BEATITUDES & WOES)

6. **Blessed** — *Matt 5:3–12; Luke 6:20–26* What makarios means and the upside-down logic of the Kingdom.

7. **The Poor and the Poor in Spirit** — *Matt 5:3; Luke 6:20* The cornerstone beatitude, and why Luke's bluntness guards Matthew's depth.
8. **Mourners, the Meek, the Hungry** — *Matt 5:4–6; Luke 6:21* Grief comforted, the gentle inheriting, hunger for righteousness and justice.
9. **Mercy, Purity, Peacemaking** — *Matt 5:7–9* The active life of Kingdom people.
10. **The Persecuted and the Woes** — *Matt 5:10–12; Luke 6:22–26* The cost of the Kingdom and the great reversal.

PART THREE — THE CHARACTER OF KINGDOM PEOPLE

11. **Salt, Light, and a City on a Hill** — *Matt 5:13–16* Visible, flavoring witness.
12. **Not to Abolish but to Fulfill** — *Matt 5:17–20* Jesus and Torah, the greater righteousness, and reading this without slandering Judaism.

PART FOUR — THE GREATER RIGHTEOUSNESS (TRANSFORMING INITIATIVES)

13. **Anger and Reconciliation** — *Matt 5:21–26* The first transforming initiative.
14. **Faithful Desire** — *Matt 5:27–30* Adultery, lust, and the integrity of the heart.
15. **Marriage and Divorce** — *Matt 5:31–32* Covenant, the protection of the vulnerable, and pastoral honesty.
16. **Truthful Speech** — *Matt 5:33–37* Oaths and integrity — let your yes be yes.
17. **The Third Way** — *Matt 5:38–42; Luke 6:29–31* Turning the cheek and the second mile as creative nonviolent resistance, not passivity.
18. **Love of Enemies and the Mercy of God** — *Matt 5:43–48; Luke 6:27–36* The summit of the Sermon.

PART FIVE — THE PRACTICES OF THE KINGDOM

19. **Righteousness Not for Show: Almsgiving** — *Matt 6:1–4* Generosity before an audience of One.
20. **Teach Us to Pray** — *Matt 6:5–8; Luke 11:1–4* The secret place and the posture of prayer.
21. **The Lord's Prayer** — *Matt 6:9–13* The whole Sermon in miniature.
22. **Forgiveness and Fasting** — *Matt 6:14–18* Forgiven and forgiving; embodied devotion.

23. **Treasure, the Single Eye, and Two Masters** — *Matt 6:19–24* Kingdom economics, part one.
24. **Do Not Be Anxious — Seek First the Kingdom** — *Matt 6:25–34* Kingdom economics, part two; providence and the priority of the reign of God.

PART SIX — THE WAY OF THE KINGDOM (DISCERNMENT & DECISION)

25. **Judge Not — Logs and Specks** — *Matt 7:1–5; Luke 6:37–42* Mercy in community.
26. **Holy Things, Pearls, and Persistent Asking** — *Matt 7:6–11* Discernment, and the Father who gives good gifts.
27. **The Golden Rule** — *Matt 7:12; Luke 6:31* The Law and the Prophets summed up.
28. **The Narrow Gate and the Two Ways** — *Matt 7:13–14* Decision.
29. **Trees, Fruit, and “Lord, Lord”** — *Matt 7:15–23; Luke 6:43–46* Authenticity over performance.

PART SEVEN — BUILDING THE HOUSE (SYNTHESIS & SENDING)

30. **The Wise and Foolish Builders** — *Matt 7:24–27; Luke 6:47–49* Hearers who do.
31. **The Authority of Jesus and the Astonished Crowd** — *Matt 7:28–29* The response, and the authority behind the words.
32. **Living the Sermon Now** — *synthesis* A rule of life and the Kingdom-now commission.
33. **A Sending** — *benediction* The blessing, and where the road leads next.

Recurring Conversation Partners

These works are the core scholarly company we keep throughout the study. Others will be added as particular passages call for them. Full page-level citations are confirmed against each edition during final editing; the sessions cite by footnote.

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Translated by R. H. Fuller. Rev. ed. New York: Macmillan, 1959. Originally *Nachfolge*, 1937.

Gushee, David P., and Glen H. Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973. Originally 1971.

Hendricks, Obery M., Jr. *The Politics of Jesus*. New York: Doubleday, 2006.

Howard-Brook, Wes. “Come Out, My People!” *God’s Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010.

Jordan, Clarence. *Sermon on the Mount*. Rev. ed. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1952.

Levine, Amy-Jill. *Sermon on the Mount: A Beginner’s Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020.

McKnight, Scot. *Sermon on the Mount. The Story of God Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

Stassen, Glen H. *Living the Sermon on the Mount*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.

Wink, Walter. *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

Wright, N. T. *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1*. London: SPCK; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004.

Wright, N. T. *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.

Production Notes

Base translation. All Scripture quotations use the NRSVue, reproduced under publication permission. Quoted text in draft sessions is set against the official licensed edition during final layout.

Video scripts. Each session opens with one single-presenter video of six minutes or less — a talking-head invitation, written for the spoken voice, that hands the learner into the written study.

Workflow. Sessions are written one at a time. Session 1 serves as the working prototype: once its voice, depth, citation style, and script format are approved, the remaining thirty-two follow the same template.