EXPERIENCING THE KING LIVING OUT THE KINGDOM

The Gospel of Matthew

Devotional Journal on the Gospel of Matthew (1st Quarter of 2025)

PREFACE

SENIOR PASTOR BEH SOO YEONG

As a disciple of Jesus, one of the most important habits to cultivate is to have a daily devotional time with the Lord, to spend time in prayer and in God's Word. To this end, there are numerous devotional materials available. In fact, one is spoilt for choice when it comes to the selection of devotional material and hence it has not been my intention to write yet another devotional guide.

However, in the course of preparing for 2025 pulpit and Bible Studies on the Gospel of Matthew, it dawn on us that in order to maximise this opportunity to know the Gospel of Matthew in greater depth, a daily devotional guide may be useful. This is because the text prescribed for each sermon and study will be fairly extensive and one would not be able to get into the "trees" otherwise.

So as the church journeys through the Gospel of Matthew together in 2025, this is a humble attempt to guide our meditations on a daily portion of Scripture for the entire year. I trust that you would find this guide helpful in your personal study and application of its teachings, and most importantly to learn what it means to experience the King and live out the Kingdom as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Content in the devotional guide
Each day, you are encouraged to first take some time to journal some devotional thoughts on the passage prescribed. Before you read through the brief notes and reflections, you should:

Read: Read the prescribed text

Record: Note down any particular verse(s) or words that strikes you

Reflect: Write your thoughts on what God is impressing upon you. This could be thanksgivings or areas of obedience needed.

Respond: Journal what you will do in response to God's Word. This may include your own prayer and resolutions.

As you can see, this is your private journal. I hope you will be encouraged to study the text for yourself and then respond to whatever the Lord may be teaching and prompting you to do.

SAMPLE

THIS IS A SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRY.

READ

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life[e]?
28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Interestingly in this text, we see Jesus teach on one of the most contemporary problems of today – worry. Perhaps it is due to the pace of life, or the pressures of the workplaces, but we hear more and more cases of people having anxiety attacks. Jesus tells us, “Do not worry.” After all worry will get us nowhere and gain us no good. Instead, He assures us that God will provide and look after all our needs, if only our priorities are right.

Do you worry constantly? What are the assurances that Jesus gives us so that we can “afford” not to worry? How do these assurances help or not help you? What can you do in order to stop worrying?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

Perhaps one reason why I am so stressed is because I am not seeking his righteousness first. I have not learnt to trust God fully.
Is it because I don't believe God the Father will look after me – that all that I need will be added to me as well?

Dear Lord, teach me to trust in you and in every word you said here. I want to cast my worry about the present project and deadline into your hands. You know I am still fearful, but I will seek not to miss church or FG meetings because of the deadline. Help me, Lord!

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

MATTHEW 5.3-16 (NIV 2011)

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness,
for they will be filled.
7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you
and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.
12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in
heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets
who were before you.
13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its
saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer
good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled
underfoot.
14 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill
cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put
it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives
light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your
light shine before others, that they may see your good
deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

MATTHEW 1.1-17

WEEK 1 (BEGINNING 1 JAN 2025) DAY 1 (WEDNESDAY)

READ

This is the genealogy[a] of Jesus the Messiah[b] the son of
David, the son of Abraham:
2 Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was
Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,
4 Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
6 and Jesse the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been
Uriah's wife,
7 Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
Abijah the father of Asa,
8 Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,
9 Uzziah the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,
10 Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,
11 and Josiah the father of Jeconiah[c] and his brothers at
the time of the exile to Babylon.

MATTHEW 1.1-17

WEEK 1 (BEGINNING 1 JAN 2025) DAY 1 (WEDNESDAY)

READ

12 After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
13 Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
Abihud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,
14 Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,
Akim the father of Elihud,
15 Elihud the father of Eleazar,
Eleazar the father of Matthan,
Matthan the father of Jacob,
16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and
Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.
17 Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham
to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and
fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Who are the key persons in the list, especially in verses 2 and 6. Why are these names important? In verse 17, the author seems to place special emphasis on the number of generations. Why?

The Jews place a special importance on genealogy. For them to accept Jesus as the Messiah, He must have a lineage that goes back to Abraham and David. This has also been foretold in the Scriptures. Hence there is a sense of fulfilment of the purposes of God. This assures us that God is sovereign and we can trust Him to bring His Word to pass.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 1.18-25

WEEK 1 DAY 2 (THURSDAY)

READ

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about[d]: His mother
Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came
together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19
Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet[e] did not
want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her
quietly.
20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to
him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take
Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the
Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the
name Jesus,[f] because he will save his people from their sins."
22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the
prophet: 23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will
call him Immanuel"[g] (which means "God with us").
24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had
commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not
consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave
him the name Jesus.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Joseph would have divorced Mary. But by the end of the narrative, he had reversed his decision. He heeded the Lord's instruction in the dream in order that the Lord's purposes will be fulfilled. Inevitably, there is a price to pay. As a result of his obedience, he would have to endure various gossips and ridicule because Mary was with child before the actual marriage.

Why was Jesus born to a virgin (vv.22-23)? After all, it seems to be against all human logic to have our Messiah come in the form of a baby. Given a choice, we would have preferred a full-grown man to appear, better still one with all the powers to convince the world that He is the One. But God's ways are higher than ours and His wisdom is greater than ours. What is so significant or special about this verse (cf. Is 7.14)? What is so special about "Immanuel"?

When we embrace Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, there is a paradigm shift that bucks the ways of the world. How counter-cultural is your faith in Jesus Christ? How ready are you to follow the ways of the Lord, forsaking thereby the ways of the world?

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

MATTHEW 2.1-12

WEEK 1 DAY 3 (FRIDAY)

READ

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”
3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:
6 “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’[b]”
7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”
9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Sometimes, we feel that the Lord is not listening to our prayers. He seems to be tarrying in answering us. Yet this passage reminds us that in His beautiful time, He will bring to pass what He has promised. Verse 6 is a direct quote from Micah 5.2, which was prophesied about 700 years prior to Christ’s birth. Yet in the fullness of time, God’s Word shall come to pass. Hence, we need to learn to wait for God’s timing, regardless of how “illogical” it may seem.

Are you seeking the Lord in some yet-to-be-answered prayer? May this passage encourage you to persevere in seeking the Lord and His purposes.

MATTHEW 1.1 - 2.12

WEEK 1 DAYS 4 & 5 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

MATTHEW 2.13-18

WEEK 2 (BEGINNING 6 JAN) DAY 1

READ

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”
14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”[c]
16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. 17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:
18 “A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus faced yet another crisis. Yet in this precarious situation, God already foreknew it and had made preparations. Consider the prophecies that have been fulfilled through this episode in this passage. No crisis is too difficult or impossible for God.

How would this spiritual reality encourage you in what you are encountering these days, especially in the “low’s” of your spiritual?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 2.19-23

WEEK 2 DAY 2

READ

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph
in Egypt 20 and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the
land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”
21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of
Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in
place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned
in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and
lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through
the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The angel once again intervened and appeared to Joseph in a dream. God’s sovereign will and plan are above any earthly ruler or king, no matter how powerful he or she may be. We serve a God who is King of kings and Lord of lords. Things might seem bleak from time to time, but we can take comfort in the sovereignty of God in our lives.

How does this challenge you to discern the will of God in your life? How has this reminder about God’s sovereignty encouraged you?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 3.1-6, 11-12

WEEK 2 DAY 3

READ

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea
2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” 3 This
is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:
“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”[a]
4 John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt
around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.5 People went out
to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.
6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

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11 “I baptize you with[b] water for repentance. But after me comes one
who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He
will baptize you with[c] the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is
in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into
the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Clearly, John was preaching a gospel of repentance of sins in preparation for the coming of Jesus. Yet it is important for us to note that for Christians, this is a continuing message that we need to embrace – that we continue to practise repentance. Of course, we have been saved from our sins at the time we come to faith in Jesus Christ. Yet we continue to be saved from our sins and addictions as we practise ongoing repentance.

What are the areas that you know God requires repentance from you? In what ways are you called to play the same role as John?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 3.7-10

WEEK 2 DAY 4

READ

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

For those of us who have received Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, it is important to adopt a posture whereby we examine our lives frequently. Is there “good fruit” to indicate a “good tree”?

What kind of fruit have you been producing? What would people say about your life’s deeds? Have you demonstrated repentance and a lifestyle that points others to Jesus? How do you assess your own life in the light of the passage?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 3.13-17

WEEK 2 DAY 5

READ

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”
15 Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.
16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This is one of the two places in the Gospel of Matthew where God audibly affirmed Jesus as His beloved Son (the other being Mt 17.5). This seems to be the very foundation of His impending ministry. All that Jesus would do is predicated on His Father-Son relationship. All that is important is that Jesus is the Son of God! What a lovely and wonderful reminder for us as we seek to follow God and do His work and will!

What is the motivation behind your life’s work and passion? How are you consciously seeking the Father’s pleasure by doing his will?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 2.13 - 3.17

WEEK 2 DAYS 6 & 7 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

MATTHEW 4.1-4

WEEK 3 (BEGINNING 13 JAN) DAY 1

READ

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”
4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

It is interesting that 4.1 started with “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit …” as if to tell us that this pericope is intentionally inserted between Jesus’ baptism and the start of His ministry. For Jesus, His ministry was founded on the Father-Son relationship we saw in 3.17, and not on His own ability to turn stones into bread. Jesus dealt with this temptation in the way we should deal with ours – by depending on God and His Word.

What do you depend on when it comes to accomplishing what you are called to do? Is it based on your own ability, intellect, education, skills or training or on God alone, who in turn endows you with assets and uses them for His disposal?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 4.5-11

WEEK 3 DAY 2

READ

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the
highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw
yourself down. For it is written:
"'He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"
7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to
the test.'"
8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all
the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you,"
he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."
10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the
Lord your God, and serve him only.'"
11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

For some of us, our identity and ministry depend on what others make us out to be – so we try to look good to win the acclaim of others. For others, it depends on what we might achieve or accumulate – our cash, car, condo, club membership and credit cards. While these are not immoral per se, they cannot be the basis of our identity and ministry, which should instead be based on our relationship with our heavenly Father.

What is the basis of your self-identity and ministry? Is it based on external things like position, possessions, pedigree and power or internal elements like your position in Christ?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 4.12-17

WEEK 3 DAY 3

READ

12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to
Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which
was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— 14 to fulfill what
was said through the prophet Isaiah:
15 "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
16 the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned."
17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of
heaven has come near."

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

By citing Is 9.1-2 in Mt 4.15-16, Matthew the Gospel writer is telling the hearers that Jesus is indeed the Messiah as prophesied by the prophet Isaiah. And from that time on, Jesus would be that light in the darkness and His ministry would be consistent and unequivocal – to preach repentance in the light of the impending kingdom of heaven.

In following Jesus, what is our own life's goal and focus? If we are followers of the King, then should we not also be following His agenda and life's goal?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 4.18-22

WEEK 3 DAY 4

READ

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.
21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The first call of Jesus was not “... go and make disciples ...” but “come and follow me ...” It is a call to a relationship with the Saviour and Master; to come and imitate what He does by allowing Him to make us fishers of men. Perhaps, one key reason why we fail many a time to be fishers of men is that we fail to abide in Christ and follow Him so much so that He could not make us effective and fruitful fishers of men.

Have you been following Jesus lately? What are the difficulties and challenges you face in following Jesus?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 4.23-25

WEEK 3 DAY 5

READ

23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues,proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. 24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. 25 Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Jesus started His ministry of teaching and preaching and healing. In this regard we too are called to do the same. No matter where we have been called to, we are called for this same ministry, albeit with differing methods and in differing intensity and with differing degree of success. The outcome that we seek is that people will follow not us, but Jesus.

Are you pointing people to Jesus through the work that you are doing? How are you teaching, proclaiming, sharing, loving, caring and praying for healing as part of your calling as Jesus' disciples so that others may also follow Him?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 4.1-25

WEEK 3 DAYS 6 & 7 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

MATTHEW 5.1-12

WEEK 4 (BEGINNING 20 JAN) DAY 1

READ

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.
The Beatitudes
He said:
3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Some people have argued that the qualities mentioned in the Beatitudes describe our character in the future kingdom; while others posit that these qualities are for the here and now. Perhaps both are correct – they are for the here and now as well as for the future. As Michael Green puts it, "The life the Sermon indicates is meant to be lived out by citizens of the kingdom, but they cannot even begin to live it until they enter the kingdom."[1] In other words, these qualities describe the nature of the people of the kingdom of God, yet at the same time, they cannot be fully "attained" until Christ comes again. Indeed, "The standards of the Sermon are neither readily attainable nor totally unattainable."[2]

Likewise, the rewards that are promised span the present as well as the future. We can experience the kingdom of God in the “here and now” as well as in the “there and future”, another illustration of the “already-but-not-yet” kingdom of God. Do you find yourself resisting or exhibiting these qualities as you mature in your Christian faith?

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[1] Green, Michael, The Message of Matthew (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), p.111.

[2] Ibid.

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

MATTHEW 5.3

WEEK 4 DAY 2

READ

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

“Blessed” means “approved” or “made joyful by the Lord”, something that runs deeper than a mere thing or occasion that makes us happy. Often, those who are poor in spirit find confidence not in themselves, but only in God. Free from drivenness and untamed striving, their joy stems from pure unmerited grace.

When you read “poor in spirit”, what comes to your mind? Do you exhibit such “poverty of spirit”? Would others around you consider you as such? How can you grow to be “poor in spirit”?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.4

WEEK 4 DAY 3

READ

4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

For someone who belongs to the kingdom, “mourning” refers to the deep grief that comes from one’s stark realisation of one’s fallenness and brokenness. Only when one is fully aware of how one’s sins have caused pain and suffering to God can one fully appreciate and be comforted by the coming of Christ for one’s sins, as alluded to in Is 61.2-3. (Mourning, however, does not mean that as Christians we have to pull a “long face” and look sad all the time. It refers rather to an inner posture of humility and brokenness.)

Are you conscious and constantly grieved by and mourning over your own sins and brokenness?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.5

WEEK 4 DAY 4

READ

5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This verse is a citation of Ps 37.11, which in essence contrasts the meek with the wicked. The meek are those who trust in the Lord and not take justice into their own hands. The meek are those who have power yet leash it under control. They will inherit the earth when God's eternal purpose and plan are fully realised and the wicked shall be no more. They shall inherit the earth as promised to God's people in the Old Testament when their enemies are completely eliminated and shalom is fully restored.

Do you constantly seek to be meek – to subject your power and autonomy under the will and control of God?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.6

WEEK 4 DAY 5

READ

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness,

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, yearn for something deeper than the physical food and drink. They yearn for the ultimate restoration of right relatedness. They are invited to come to buy “without money and without cost” from the One who has come to satisfy our hunger and thirst – Jesus Himself (cf. Is 55.1-2).

What comfort can we take from the verse in our quest for righteousness? How much do you depend on Christ to satisfy your desire to make things right?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.1-6

WEEK 4 DAYS 6 & 7 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

MATTHEW 5.7

WEEK 5 (BEGINNING 27 JAN) DAY 1

READ

7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

God desires mercy from His people (Mt 6.14-15; 9.13; 12.7; 23.23), for after all, mercy giving and forgiveness are part of the restoration of the broken relationship that Jesus came for. As God's people, how then can we co-exist in a state of eternal shalom when there is still unforgiveness and lack of mercy on our part?

The question for many of us, however, is whether our receiving of mercy is conditional upon our granting of mercy. Of course, God's mercy is unconditional. Yet, if we are to understand the Sermon on the Mount, we would know that Jesus is talking about our inherent nature as God's people that need to be lived out at the same time. People who have been shown mercy ought to show mercy. Hence if we do not show mercy, it is not unreasonable to say that perhaps we have not truly appreciated and experienced God's mercy that is showered upon us.

Let's learn and re-learn what it means to receive mercy from God and to release mercy to others. To whom can you show mercy today?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.8

WEEK 5 DAY 2

READ

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This verse alludes to Ps 24.3-4, which points out that only those with clean hands and pure hearts will see the Lord. These are the ones who do not bow down to any idol but worship only the Lord our God. Idols, refer not just to those made of stones or wood, but anything that displaced God as the centre of our affection and allegiance.

Consider your own life today. Can you honestly say to God that you have a pure heart? Are there areas that need to be surrendered to Him so that He can truly be the Lord of your life?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.9

WEEK 5 DAY 3

READ

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

It is part of the nature of God's people to "seek peace and pursue it" (cf. Ps 34.14), for after all they have been granted that peace through Christ. What flows in ought to flow out! This is not just a peaceable nature, but a disposition to actively seek peace. Pray that God will give you the grace to live out God's nature in you.

With whom do you need to make peace today? Who can you mediate for today? Who around you can do with a positive word of encouragement?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.10

WEEK 5 DAY 4

READ

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The pursuit of righteousness often attracts attacks and challenges. While we do not actively seek such opposition, often it becomes inevitable. The verse encourages us to take heart and know that we are assured of the kingdom of heaven, where God rules nonetheless, in the here and now. We are promised God's abiding presence even now when we face opposition.

However, one needs to note that this is different from "persecutions not due to righteousness." These are often due to our own folly, arrogance or wrongdoings, which yield their own consequences. As Christians, we are called instead to live responsibly and worthy of God's calling. If you are encountering persecution, consider honestly if it is indeed due to the pursuit of righteousness or not.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.11-12

WEEK 5 DAY 4

READ

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

By using the word “when” rather than “if”, Matthew seems to indicate here that one is to expect persecution if one is a believer. One needs to remember that the persecutions in view here are not due to negligence or wrongdoings of the believer, in which case punishment is reasonably to be expected.

Yet when we encounter unjustified persecutions, the posture that is encouraged is one of joy and gladness. Many will say this is “easier said than done”. Yet this kingdom of heaven is not ushered in by man’s effort or word, but by the outworking of God’s sovereign will and purpose. Perhaps then, we should take comfort that as we trust in the Lord, He will enable and embolden us for that day of persecution.

Thank God that Christ has already set an example for us when He was persecuted. Pray for strength and fortitude when we encounter similar trials and persecutions.

MATTHEW 5.1-6

WEEK 5 DAYS 6 & 7 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

MATTHEW 5.3-12 (REVIEW)

WEEK 6 (BEGINNING 3 FEB) DAY 1

READ

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and
falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice
and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the
same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Since this is such an important area, we are deliberately taking some time in these next three days to pause and review the Beatitudes. Take some time to review these 10 verses and commit them to memory if you have yet to do so.
Ask the Lord to bring to your consciousness ways you need to apply this passage.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.3-12 (REVIEW)

WEEK 6 DAY 2

READ

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and
falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice
and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the
same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

By living in our world 24/7, many a time we imbibe the values of this world. We take on the worldly understanding of "blessedness" such as being financially independent or materially blessed. Yet these can often be very far from the biblical definitions of blessedness. By comparing and contrasting the values that we truly hold to with that in the Beatitudes, we get a true picture of where we need to grow in.

How would the Beatitudes in verses 3-12 differ from your own perception of "blessedness"? May you be given a clearer picture of yourself presently – your values, priorities and aspirations – through this spiritual exercise.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.3-12 (REVIEW)

WEEK 6 DAY 3

READ

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and
falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice
and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the
same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Having considered your values and world view yesterday, we seek the Lord to mould and shape us for the future. Becoming like Jesus is a long process. Like the title of a book by Eugene Peterson, it is “A Long Obedience in the Same Direction”. But be encouraged that through the Holy Spirit, Christ is forming Himself in you. Sure, we lack this quality and that characteristic. But He is not finished with you and will indeed “complete the good work that He has started” in you!

In what ways have you been growing to be more like Jesus, in ways that is approved by God? What are some areas in your life where you desire change? Ask God to “imprint” these values and characteristics into your heart. By faith, trust that He will bring it to pass.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.13

WEEK 6 DAY 4

READ

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

There are numerous possible uses of salt in the ancient world (at least 11, as listed by one author). The most common understanding is that salt is used for flavouring and preservation of food. The idea is that disciples are to be like salt – to provide flavouring (making a difference) to the world by preventing corruption.

Of course, many of us would have encountered Christians who are indeed different, but unfortunately in a negative way, which turns others away from the gospel. In what ways are you ***positively*** different in your values and lifestyle as compared to the people among whom you are placed to influence?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.14-16

WEEK 6 DAY 5

READ

14 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorifyyour Father in heaven.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Unlike the salt, which is insidious, the light is for all to see. Perhaps in a way, that the “best” salt is unseen but felt, while the “best” light is seen but not felt. So of us do make a difference in our lifestyle, seeking to influence the people around us for Christ. But unless this difference is detected by others, it is of no use.

How would you live such that you can not only be a positive influence on the around you, but are also perceived as such? As the “light of the world”, how would you live that would “let your light shine among men”? Make a decision to bless someone today with your good deeds so that others will “praise your Father in heaven”.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.3-16

WEEK 6 DAYS 6 & 7 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

MATTHEW 5.17-20

WEEK 7 (BEGINNING 10 FEB) DAY 1

READ

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

At a time when righteousness is based on the absolute and often legalistic adherence to the Law, Jesus is pointing the people to the fulfilment of the Law through His own coming. This does not mean that Jesus came and obeyed or kept every part of the Law, even though He did. Rather, He is saying that up till then, the Law and the Prophets point forward to the coming Messiah. The Torah was not God’s last word but only provisional.[3] Hence when Jesus the Messiah comes, He carries them to a new era of fulfilment.

This explains Mt 5.20, where now a righteousness that is higher than the Pharisees is needed. It is no longer enough to just keep the letter of the Law; it is required that the spirit of the Law be adhered to as well (Mt 5.21-48). God is now looking at the inward attitudes and the heart rather than just the outward appearance. In this sense, it is a whole new concept and understanding of righteousness.

Hence those who enter the kingdom of heaven are those who have aligned their hearts completely towards God – a sign of full conversion or complete surrender of the self to God, through the grace and mercy of Christ. Not only are they seeking to

obey the law outwardly, but they are also inwardly attuned to God's desires and ways. How have you been treating the commands and laws of God? Has it been only an outward adherence or does it also include an inward complete surrender?

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[3] France, R.T., The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p.183.

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

MATTHEW 5.21-26

WEEK 7 DAY 2

READ

21 “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.
23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.
25 “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The following six devotions focus on the six illustrations of how a new concept of righteousness goes beyond the mere outward adherence of the Law to the inward attitude of the disciple.

Through the coming of the Messiah, there is now a higher demand of “do not murder”. It places a premium on our ***right relationship*** with people of the faith, as well as those outside. Jesus teaches that we need to be reconciled with them as soon as possible.

As people of the kingdom, our conduct is now subject to the demands of the King. How then should you relate to your brothers/sisters in Christ as well as your adversaries? Are there people with whom we need to be reconciled? Do this in humility, as quickly as possible, for that pleases the Lord. Ask the Lord for strength and compassion for you to follow through with it.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.27-30

WEEK 7 DAY 3

READ

27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’[e] 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

By the phrase “you have heard it said …” Jesus is now “raising the bar” regarding adultery. Not only should one not actually commit adultery, but he also demands that we do not do so in our hearts and minds. The text dictates that we take such a serious view of it that we are prepared to take all measures to eradicate such careless and flippant thoughts and behaviour.

While we may not literally gouge out our own eye or cut off our own hand, it does mean taking appropriate and decisive actions that will enable obedience. What are some corrective as well as proactive actions that you as a disciple of Christ need to take to adopt a ***right relationship*** with persons of the opposite gender? What are behaviours (such as casual flirting, pornography etc) that you need to amend in order to follow the spirit of Jesus’ teaching?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.31-32

WEEK 7 DAY 4

READ

31 “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Jesus deals pointedly with our ***right relationship*** with our spouse. As disciples of Christ, it is no longer about how to formalise the way we divorce (as in Dt 24.1). Rather, the original intent – for life – of marriage is now emphasised. In a world where lifelong marriage is no longer held in high regard and extra-marital affairs are no longer disdained; all the more as disciples of Christ, we need to safeguard such an institution and to model right conduct in a fallen world.

This means protecting and nurturing our marriage for the long haul so that we will reap the full joy and blessings of this special relationship. For those who are married, what are you doing about your marriage? Are you rejoicing in the blessings that result from your marriage? Are you humbly seeking help when help is needed? (For those who are not married, think of your close friends and loved ones and pray for their marriages – that God will protect and nourish them.)

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.33-37

WEEK 7 DAY 5

READ

33 “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ 34 But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Jesus’ teaching about oaths is so radically different from what the people were used to (cf. Lv 19.12). They are our promises to others around us. As people of the kingdom, there should be transparent truthfulness as an expression of our right relationship with others. There is no need to resort to swearing, invoking the name of God or any object to persuade others to believe us. Neither is there a need to invoke any contingent disaster in the event of our being found lying.

Is truthfulness a trait of yours? Can your family, friends, clients, schoolmates, etc take you at your word? Or are you guilty of half truths or even exaggeration in order to bolster your position, whether in your personal life or in your workplace or school?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.17-37

WEEK 7 DAYS 6 & 7 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

MATTHEW 5.38-42

WEEK 8 (BEGINNING 17 FEB) DAY 1

READ

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The norm during Jesus’ day was to exact retributive action in order to assert one’s right. But Jesus came to establish a “greater righteousness”, challenging the people of His kingdom to live out a non self-centred approach in our ***right relationship*** with others. As his disciples, we are taught to conduct ourselves in a way that is others-seeking rather than self-seeking, thereby breaking the vicious cycle of violence-begetting-violence. This, however, should not be incompatible with or contradictory to the need to stand up for good and the rights of others or a firm stand for justice in society, albeit in peaceful ways.

As difficult as it may be, in what ways can and will you seek to resolve your present personal conflicts and grievances that will apply Jesus’ teaching, even to the point of forgoing your rights?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.43-47

WEEK 8 DAY 2

READ

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This last of six illustrations highlights the apparent paradoxical values of the kingdom. How does one love one’s enemies when an enemy is firstly by definition one who is not loved? But here, Jesus is teaching us to love those who do not love us, which in itself is a reflection of God Himself, who loved us while we were still sinners and unlovable. By loving our enemies, we are living out the values that form part of our nature as kingdom people, seeking to demonstrate a right relationship in our conduct.

What does “love your enemies” mean to you practically? Who would you consider your enemies? Who are those whom you find hard to love?
How would you love them as an outflow of God’s love for you?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.48

WEEK 8 DAY 3

READ

48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This verse serves as the summary statement for the six illustrations in Mt 5.21-47. Perhaps the initial thought is a sense of helplessness, “Oh Lord, how can I be perfect?” It is like the echoing of Leviticus 19.2, “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy”. Yet we must realise that the impetus for us to seek to be perfect is really to model after the character and ways of God. We no longer aim only to fulfil the laws of God per se. Instead, we aim to know the mind and heart of God who is behind the Laws.

As Christ’s disciples, we have a “greater righteousness”, modelled after the righteousness of Christ, which translates into a right relatedness with those around us. And alas, we realise that we are to be perfect not by our own strength but through the blood of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. May you continue to seek the Lord to put his law in your mind and write it on your heart (Jer 31.33).

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.17-48

WEEK 8 DAY 4

READ

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

21 “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.
23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.
25 “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.17-48

WEEK 8 DAY 4

READ

31 “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

33 “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ 34 But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

There are various common threads throughout the six examples, including (1) how we are to relate with people around us; (2) a greater righteousness that goes beyond the "mere" obedience to the letter of the Law; and (3) the call to follow Jesus' teaching which stems from the mind and heart of God.

Very often, discipleship is perceived as a set of do's and don'ts. Once we fulfil them, we tend to think we are spiritual. Yet Jesus came to call us to a different way of thinking, which would result in a different conduct. As people of the kingdom, we are called to constantly search our motives and passion behind the things we do and not do. Does your obedience reflect the essence of Jesus' teaching?

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

MATTHEW 5.17-48 (REVIEW)

WEEK 8 DAY 5

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Before we leave this section on the righteousness and conduct of the people of the kingdom, perhaps we should review what Jesus has been teaching. How has His teaching been brought to bear on our lives? In our relationship with others, how has it been an outcome of a “greater righteousness”?

Specifically, where are the areas in our lives that need to be transformed? Ask the Lord to do His work of change in your heart, so that it will be an obedience that is born out of joy and love, rather than duty and obligation.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 5.17-48

WEEK 8 DAYS 6 & 7 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

MATTHEW 6.1

WEEK 9 (BEGINNING 24 FEB) DAY 1

READ

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Having dealt with the conduct of God's people, Jesus shifts His attention to the way they show their commitment and devotion. Verse 1 serves as the overarching principle here, that our acts of devotion to God should not be used to "show-off" to man.

These acts can range from giving of our time, contributing to someone's personal needs to helping someone with their chores. These are our signs of commitment and devotion to God – a response to God's love and grace as disciples of Christ. What are your "acts of righteousness"? What are some ways you can express your devotion to God with a genuine and pure motivation?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 6.2-4

WEEK 9 DAY 2

READ

2 “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

While the hypocrites demonstrate their charity for all to see, Jesus teaches that our piety should be reserved only for God to see, hence “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”. This does not mean that literally our giving must be in secret, but it does mean that we need to ensure that our giving to the needy is purely motivated by our love for God and desire to help others instead of receiving honour and praise from man.

What are the works of charity that you are led by God to do? Are you motivated purely by your devotion to God? How would you ensure that your charity and service are not motivated by people’s praise and honour?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 6.5-8

WEEK 9 DAY 3

READ

5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Continuing with the theme of pure devotion to the Lord, Matthew uses the illustration of prayer. Unlike the hypocrites who would display their piety among the crowds, Jesus teaches that we ought to direct our prayers only to God, as it should be. Instead of being long and ostentatious, prayers ought to be heartfelt, honest and simple.

This is such an important reminder for us, especially those who are called to pray publicly from time to time. How would you alter the way you pray to ensure that your devotion to God is not a display of piety before humans to gain praise and honour?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 6.9

WEEK 9 DAY 4

READ

9 “This, then, is how you should pray:
“‘Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Jesus teaches His disciples to pray. It is not meant to be a mindless repetition of a prayer chant but rather a model by which we express our prayers to God. By hallowing God’s name we are saying, “May your name be held in high esteem or in reverence.” It reminds us that while we can address a personal God, He is also to be held in honour.

How can you address God when you pray to Him that would hold Him in high regard and honour? What is your attitude towards God? Is he a friend only or is he also the Almighty God and Creator? Take time to praise God in your prayers today.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 6.10

WEEK 9 DAY 5

READ

10 your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

In praying verse 10, we are saying, “May your complete rule be achieved on earth; and may what you ordained and appointed be fulfilled completely.” To bring it closer to home, we are crying out to God that His intended purpose be completely brought to pass in our lives wherever we are – in our schools, offices and homes.

How would you pray that God’s will be done in your life? Pray also for those around you that God’s will for them will indeed come to pass. Be as specific as possible.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 6.1-10

WEEK 9 DAYS 6 & 7 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

MATTHEW 6.11

WEEK 10 (BEGINNING 3 MAR) DAY 1

READ

11 Give us today our daily bread.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Verse 11 reminds us that all that we receive comes from Him. Our vocations and jobs that sustain us physically, our friends and loved ones who support us emotionally, our income that provides for us materially, etc are all from Him.

Tell Him what your needs are. Trust that He will provide them in His perfect time according to His perfect will. Believe that God is never too far, and his hand is never too short. Pray also for the needs of those around you.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 6.12

WEEK 10 DAY 2

READ

12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

We ask God to forgive us. When we truly appreciate the extent of our offences against God and our deserved punishment, we will not hesitate to ask for forgiveness. Likewise, it is also a reminder to us that we are called to also forgive those who offended us. When we realise how much we need forgiveness from God, we will not be tardy in forgiving others. Indeed, “to ask to be forgiven while refusing to forgive is hypocritical.”[4]

For what would you need to be forgiven by God? Seek God’s forgiveness for unconfessed sins that hinder our walk with God. At the same time, whom do you need to forgive today? Ask for God’s unconditional love to enable you to forgive others who have sinned against you.

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[4] France, R.T., The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p.250.

MATTHEW 6.13

WEEK 10 DAY 3

READ

13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

While verse 12 deals with past sins, verse 13 deals with the need for protection from future ones. God does not tempt us (Jas 1.13), hence many understand this verse to mean “testing” or “trials”. But more important, this prayer expresses our utter need for God in dealing with our own carnality as well as the Devil’s snares.

What trials and testing and temptations are you facing recently? How are you depending on God to enable you to overcome them? Have you brought them to the foot of the Cross and before the throne of divine grace for deliverance?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 6.14-15

WEEK 10 DAY 4

READ

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin
against you, your heavenly Father will also
forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others
their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

In repeating the need to forgive others, it would seem that forgiveness of others is especially crucial for the people of the new kingdom. Naturally so, for we become the people of the kingdom purely because of the forgiveness we receive. How then can we begrudge and deny forgiveness to others? While our salvation is not conditional on our forgiving others, it is important to remember that God expects us to forgive, just as we have been forgiven.

Have you offended anyone and have you asked for forgiveness? Are there also people who have offended you? Have you genuinely forgiven them? Are you willing to be obedient to Jesus' teaching in forgiving them?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 6.16-18

WEEK 10 DAY 5

READ

16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

After using the areas of giving and prayer to illustrate His teaching that we be properly motivated in our acts of devotion to God, Jesus ends off this section with the aspect of fasting. Fasting whether from food or anything else that draws our devotion away from God, is considered a spiritual discipline that ought to be practised regularly.

God’s reward is ours when we fast out of a genuine desire and motive. Instead of making oneself look pitiful and pious to man, fasting ought to reflect the true state of penitence and longing for God to intervene in our situations. Do you have a regular discipline of fasting? For what reason and with what attitude do you fast? How would you practise a regular habit of fasting and with the right attitude?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 6.11-18

WEEK 10 DAYS 6 & 7 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

MATTHEW 6.19-24

WEEK 11(BEGINNING 10 MAR) DAY 1

READ

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!
24 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Mt 6.19-34 deals with the concerns of the disciple. As people of the new kingdom, we are called to place our priorities in that which will last for eternity. One challenge to such unwavering commitment is the temptation of money. Verse 21 says it well, that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

You may say, “money makes the world go round” or “no money no talk.” Of course, money is an essential and important part of our lives. We need money for almost everything. Yet the question is not whether money is important, but rather who our master is. Hence, it is imperative for us disciples to constantly test our own allegiance – which master do we truly serve.

How tightly do you hold on to your money? How obsessed are you in making money? Does money supersede all other aspects of life, such as family and friends, time with and service to God, etc? How much would you use money to extend God’s kingdom? Let’s not forget that if we are not careful, what you possess will possess you!

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 6.25-34

WEEK 11 DAY 2

READ

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?
28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Interestingly in this text, we see Jesus’ teaching on one of the most contemporary problems of today – worry. Perhaps it is due to the pace of life, or the pressures of the workplaces, but we hear more and more cases of people having anxiety attacks. Jesus tells us “Do not worry.” After all worry will get us nowhere and gain us no good. Instead, He assures us that God will provide and look after all our needs, if only our priorities are right.

Do you worry constantly? What are the assurances that Jesus gives us so that we can “afford” not to worry? How do these assurances help or not help you? What can you do in order to stop worrying?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 7.1-6

WEEK 11 DAY 3

READ

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.
3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.
6 “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 turn and tear you to pieces.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Jesus first teaches that we should not judge (Mt 7.1). In fact, he teaches that we should dispense our advice to others sparingly and selectively lest they scorn it and attack us (Mt 7.6). Yet, he also tells us that we need to see clearly before we remove the speck from our brother’s eye. It seems then that “do not judge” is different from do not point out your brother’s or sister’s fault. The former, we are forbidden to do; but the latter, we are told to do.

So how and when do we point out your brother’s or sister’s fault? We do so by first removing the plank (faults and sins that are even greater) out of our own eyes. But how do we do that, since the plank itself would obscure our own sight? Do you first desire to have God remove your own faults and sins? Do you have a community of trusted friends whom you can invite to point out your blind spots to you, lovingly and truthfully?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 7.7-11

WEEK 11 DAY 4

READ

7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.
9 “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! 12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

We are told to ask, seek and knock. Triple emphasis here. For after all, our heavenly father would never deprive us of that which is good for us. Surely, he would fare better, much better than earthly fathers in providing for their children. Yet the operative phrase is “give good gifts” (Mt 7.11). What we think is good for us may r really be truly good for us in God’s divine wisdom. Nonetheless, we should ask o. God; then trust Him to give or not give, according to his wisdom and for our own good.

Ask! Ask of the Lord what is good for you and let him give to you what the Father knows best. What are your needs, desires and yearnings and what would you ask of God today?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 7.12

WEEK 11 DAY 5

READ

12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

When pressed to give a summary of the Law and Prophets, Hillel, a Jewish Rabbi taught “do not do to your neighbour what is hateful to you.”[5] Yet Jesus “raise the bar” by providing the positive rather than the negative injunction. To do to others what we would have them do to us is certainly far more demanding. Yet it speaks of self-giving love that must characterise the people of the new kingdom.

What does this summary command mean to you practically in your present relationship with your spouse, children, friends, family members, colleagues and even enemies?

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[5] France, R.T., The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p.283.

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 7.1-12

WEEK 11 DAYS 6 & 7 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

MATTHEW 7.13-14

WEEK 12 (BEGINNING 17 MAR) DAY 1

READ

13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

After providing a vision of how the people of the new kingdom would and should look like (5.1-7.12), He goes on to give warnings about heeding and doing his word. The first warning is about not despising the small gate and narrow road through which we enter and on which we tread. The teachings of Jesus are apparently “restrictive,” yet it gives life and life abundantly. So heed it!

Is the apparent “restrictiveness” of Jesus’ teaching hindering you from obeying? What would you do to experience the new kingdom life that Jesus talks about? What is one practical step of obedience for you to “enter through the narrow gate?”

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 7.15-20

WEEK 12 DAY 2

READ

15 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

For the remaining part of Matthew 7, Jesus uses three contrast to bring home his teaching (the narrow versus wide gates, the true versus false disciples; the wise versus foolish builders).

By using the contrasting metaphor of the good tree and bad tree, Jesus brings home the point – to watch out for false teachers. This is so relevant for us today when there is a plethora of teachers and prophets and gurus. How do we know who is right? How do we discern which teachings is wrong? By the fruit of their lives! True teachers who teach about the new kingdom cannot but live by the new kingdom values. Recognise these teachers by the good fruit in their lives.

Do you exhibit good fruit yourself? Do you see good fruit in your spiritual teachers, including the “celebrity” preachers and teachers?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 7.21-23

WEEK 12 DAY 3

READ

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day,‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Verses 21-23 ought to send chills down our spines. Are we truly his disciples? Do we constantly desire to do the will of the Father? Lest we mistake this for conditional salvation, we should note that one who is a true disciple cannot but do the will of the Father. The Spirit who dwells in her life will cause her to live out the kingdom life. Yet there are things that often stumble and hinder us, such as un-repented sins, past baggage and bondages or un-surrendered passion and desires.

Are you truly experiencing the King? Are you living out the kingdom? Is there anything that stumbles or hinders you from living the fully-orbed lifestyle – doing God’s will – of the new kingdom?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 7.24-27

WEEK 12 DAY 4

READ

24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Most, if not all of us wants to have a house that is founded on solid rock. Yet by our lack of obedience, many of us would choose to build on sand. Most of us have been hearing sermons and teachings for years, but how many of us are conscientiously applying and living out the truths that we learn? Unless and until we are living out the kingdom values, we run the danger of falling away when the hard times come.

Therefore, before the rains and the winds come, examine your life – are you merely listening to Jesus’ teaching or are you actually heeding it? In what tangible and specific ways would you learn to heed His warning all the time?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 7.28-29

WEEK 12 DAY 5

READ

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

In these closing verses to Matthew 5-7, he writes that the crowds were amazed because of the authority of Jesus compared to their own teachers. This authority stems from the fact that Jesus himself is the King, who comes to inaugurate the kingdom. He teaches about the characteristics and conduct of citizens of this kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, the important consideration for us is whether we are heeding what this King of the kingdom teaches. Do you heed what the Kings says and teaches? Do we seek to put into practice what we hear and read in the Scriptures? Look back at the journal entries for the past three months. Has there been actual obedience or mere intellectual assent? Would you make a commitment to always do what the Kings says?

RECORD REFLECT RESPOND

MATTHEW 7.13-29

WEEK 12 DAYS 6 & 7 (SATURDAY & SUNDAY)

RECORD **REFLECT** **RESPOND**

What are some things that God has been revealing to you in this past week's devotions?

How are you responding to God in these aspects?

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