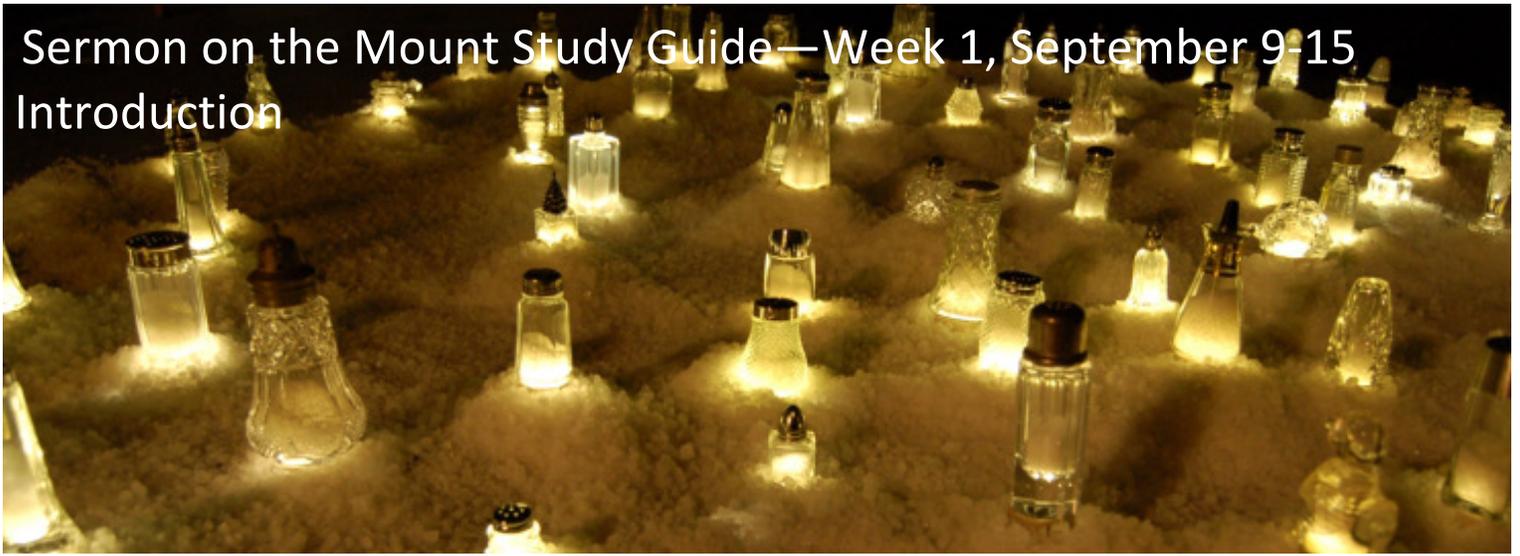


Sermon on the Mount Study Guide—Week 1, September 9-15

Introduction



- I. “Now, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.” (Matthew 5:1-2)
- II. Opening prayer for Illumination
- III. Group Discussion
 1. Expectations
 2. Explanation of Group Focus and Study Structure
 3. Resources to be Used
 4. Pp. 5-9 in Stott Study Guide
- IV. *The Divine Conspiracy*, pp. xiv-95; 136-139 (Overview of Sermon):

In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Christian philosopher and author Dallas Willard writes, “More than any other single thing, in any case, *the practical irrelevance of actual obedience to Christ* accounts for the weakened effect of Christianity in the world today, with its increasing tendency to emphasize political and social action as the primary way to serve God. It also accounts for the practical irrelevance of Christian faith to individual character development and overall personal sanity and well-being” (xv, emphasis Willard’s).

Willard argues that this failure to actually obey Jesus has distilled the Christian Gospel into a collection of “sin management” programs aimed more at controlling the amount of sin people stumble into rather than fostering their holistic transformation in Christ.

But Willard argues that this is not the way it’s supposed to be. Instead, he maintains, “To become a disciple of Jesus is to accept now that inversion of human distinctions that will sooner or later be forced upon everyone by the irresistible reality of his kingdom. How must we think of him to see the inversion from our present viewpoint? We must, simply, accept that he is the best and smartest man who ever lived in this world, that he is even now ‘the prince of the kings of earth’ (Rev. 1:5). Then we heartily join his cosmic conspiracy to overcome evil with good” (90).

Willard maintains throughout his book that the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 is one place in scripture where we come to terms with what it looks like to be a disciple of Jesus and thus become present co-workers in his kingdom. Such a perspective, argues Willard, is key to understanding what these three chapters of scripture are saying to us here and now.

As a means of further introduction to the Sermon, please read pages 136-139, “Outlining the ‘Sermon’” and “The Sequential Order in the Discourse Must Be Respected” in *The Divine Conspiracy*, discussing as necessary.

V. Questions of 1st Importance:

1. Willard charges that “*the practical irrelevance of actual obedience to Christ* accounts for the weakened effect of Christianity in the world today” (xv). Does this ring true for us? Do we feel the same way? In what ways is this a misdirected charge? In what ways is it right on target?
2. What is the Kingdom of God? Where is it? When is it? Who is it? How is it? (DC, pp. 21-29, 71, 90)
3. Do we think of Jesus as smart? Why or why not? In what ways is he not smart? In what ways is he smart? Are there certain areas of our lives where Jesus is smart and certain areas where he’s not smart? Do we read the Bible as if Jesus is smart? (DC, pp. 93-95)
4. What does “fulfillment of God’s law” mean? If Jesus’ intent in the Sermon on the Mount is to lead people “into fulfillment of the true law,” as Willard argues on page 136, what are the implications?
5. Should the Sermon on the Mount actually be obeyed?
6. Willard makes it clear on pages 138 and 139 that the sequential order of the Sermon is important to keep in mind when reading it. In other words, Willard says that we have to read the Sermon in order to get what Jesus is driving at. According to Willard, how is this true?

VI. Questions of 2nd Importance:

1. What are our pre-conceived notions about the Sermon on the Mount? How have we read it in the past?
2. What are some gospels of “sin management”? Do we adhere to any of them? (DC, pp. 41-42)
3. How do we try to secure ourselves? In other words, on what do we base our security? A good moral reputation? National defense? Piety? Good grades? Certain possessions? Body image? Right beliefs? Knowledge? Related to these questions, is the Sermon on the Mount a practical basis for human security? (DC, pg. 91)
4. What is “the good life”? For our cultures? For ourselves? For Christians?
5. What is *agape* love? (DC, pp. 182-184)
6. What is Willard’s outline of the Sermon? (DC, pp. 136-139)

VII. If so desired, watch Monday’s chapel on this week’s text at:

VIII. In *The Divine Conspiracy* and other works, Willard makes it clear that the Spiritual Disciplines (such things as fasting, silence, solitude, simplicity, study, worship, prayer, celebration, etc.) are essential parts of becoming disciples of Jesus and members of his kingdom. For each study, then, we will provide a suggested discipline to practice throughout each week in order to introduce us to these ancient and central methods of Christian practice. These suggestions are not meant to guilt anyone into following disciplines they wouldn’t normally. They are simply options for introducing those who may not be familiar with them to their potential benefit. Each group then may decide whether or not to follow the suggested disciplines each week and how they will provide accountability within the group should they choose to participate in them. For further resources on the disciplines, see pages 341-369 of *The Divine Conspiracy*, Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Richard Foster’s *The Celebration of Discipline*, or John Ortberg’s *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*.