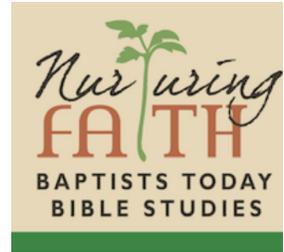


# Adult Teaching Resources

February 19, 2017



## Looking Forward (January 1-February 26)

Matthew 5:13-20 – “Salt, Light, and Law”

Matthew 5:21-37 – “Then, and Now”

**Matthew 5:38-48 – “Seriously?”**

Matthew 17:1-19 – “Keeping Secrets”

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Subscribe to *Nurturing Faith* to access the core Bible content for this lesson. Find links and videos related to this lesson.

## FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Bible Background

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*“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* Matt. 5:48

The old saying that is attributed to legendary football coach Vince Lombardi goes, “Practice makes perfect.” The words he actually said were, “Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect.” Anyone who has worked to achieve the highest level of anything—sports, music, arts, business, parenting, friendship, and health—know how difficult it is to be perfect.

Then, we come to church, or meet with this group, and we read today’s scripture. We focus on our Key Verse that tells us to “Be perfect.” Knowing how difficult perfection is with other pursuits, we really struggle trying to achieve perfection with our discipleship.

And yet, that’s what we’re told to do—“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Seriously!?

### Opening

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In the large group setting, ask each person to share the one area of their life they feel they are really good at doing. This is not time to be humble and shy. If someone feels they are good at a particular sport, tell them to say it. If someone is really good at negotiating contracts, tell them to say it. If someone is really good at writing, or drawing, or parenting, or playing an instrument...

As each person shares, write their answers on the board or a large sheet of paper for everyone to see. Then, ask each person to think of a time when they were doing their activity and reached the highest level they could.

How close to perfection would that be?

Describe the feeling of being in that “zone.”

How has that affected future attempts?

## Reading the Bible

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Today's passage is a continuation of our previous lesson. In this section from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers a new interpretation on the Jewish law. Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." (Matt 5:17) He challenges us to a higher way of living.

What is the old way about retaliation? What does Jesus say we should do?

How do we achieve perfection when someone wrongs us? How are we supposed to treat others? How are we told to give?

What is the old way about treating our enemies? What does Jesus say we should do?

How does God view the evil and the good, and the righteous and the unrighteous?

How are we supposed to love? Who are we supposed to love? What is our reward when we love?

What are we challenged to do?

## Making Connections

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We've read what Jesus says about retaliation. What do you say? How did you form your position on this topic? How has scripture influenced your stance? How has Jesus influenced your stance? How has experience influenced your stance?

We've read what Jesus says about giving freely. What do you say? How did you form your position on this topic? How has scripture influenced your stance? How has Jesus influenced your stance? How has experience influenced your stance?

We've read about what Jesus says about how we are to treat our enemies. What do you say? How did you form your position on this topic? How has scripture influenced your stance? How has Jesus influenced your stance? How has experience influenced your stance?

Of the three topics from this section, which is the most challenging for you? Why? What is your struggle?

## So What?

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Form smaller groups for intimate conversation. Tell each group that the last verse of this passage might be the most troubling. We are told to be perfect. In their small groups, answer these questions for discussion and conversation.

What do you think Jesus means by “be perfect?”

How are we to emulate our heavenly Father (who is perfect), when we are flawed creatures?

Do you think “doing your best” is good enough for Jesus? Why do you say that?

What are we supposed to do with this verse?

After each group has had some time to discuss, open the floor for each group to share their conversations with the larger group. What are the similarities? What are the differences? How does your larger group interpret this verse?

## The Challenge

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Invite everyone to look at the board or large sheet from the beginning of the lesson. Have them find what they shared. Challenge them to work toward perfection in that area of their life this week. What resources are needed? What attitude is required? What must be rehearsed or practiced before the “performance?” Who else needs to be involved?

## Prayer

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*Loving God, you ask us to be perfect, as you are perfect. To be honest, that's hard. We are flawed people. We are sinners. Forgive us. We try hard to do our best, but we keep getting in the way. Help us to let you lead us, so that we will follow you and learn what you desire for us. Help us to lean on you so that we might get closer to the perfection you desire. Amen.*

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Different rules** – Many years ago, shortly after I moved to a new church field, a couple in the congregation invited me to their home for dinner and to play a card game called *Canasta*. I looked forward to it, because I grew up playing *Canasta*, but had met few other people who did. My mother’s mother was a *Canasta*-playing fanatic, and long before any of her twelve grandchildren were big enough to hold all the cards in our hand, she would teach us the rules of *Canasta*. Or, at least, she would teach us *her* rules. I thought they were the only ones.

I quickly discovered that my new friends played by different rules, and all my confidence went down the drain. I thought I was pretty good at the game I knew, but playing by their rules called for different strategies, and it was hard to break out of my old way of thinking and focus on the game they were playing.

I was so convinced that someone taught them the wrong rules that I went home and looked up “*Canasta*” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (the Internet was still a dream and the only Google around was a bubble-eyed, donkey-riding cartoon character named Barney Google). I learned from the encyclopedia that there are several different versions of the game: not everyone plays by the same rules.

**Extreme measures** – It’s likely that Jesus employed hyperbole when talking about the measures one should employ to avoid certain sins. For example, in vv. 29-30 Matthew reports that Jesus said “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.”

Jesus knew that chopping off a hand might deter a thief, but wouldn’t change his spirit – and one-eyed people are perfectly capable of lust. Though employing physical symbols, Jesus was more concerned with inner motivations than outward behavior. His kingdom ethic called for radical surgery to the mind and heart that rules our hands and eyes.



**Hammurabi’s law code** – This copy of the famed stele of Hammurabi is in the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. The engraving at the top shows Hammurabi, the smaller figure at left, receiving the laws from Shamash, the sun god.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**A frivolous lawsuit?** – Why would someone sue another person for his or her tunic? The situation would probably reflect a small-time lender who had loaned someone money, with his or her tunic as collateral. Old Testament law spoke to similar loans, insisting that someone who took a poor person’s outer cloak as collateral should return it each night, lest the person have nothing to guard against the evening chill.

“If you take your neighbor’s cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; for it may be your neighbor’s only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbor cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate” (Exod. 22:26-27).

**A Roman mile** – New Testament references to a “mile” reflect the Roman definition of a mile as 1,000 paces, with each pace equal to five Roman feet. The Roman measure of a foot was slightly shorter than today, so that the total distance was just under 5,000 feet, a bit shorter than the 5,280 feet that currently defines a mile. The name “mile” derives from the Latin term *mille passum*, meaning “1,000 paces.”

# The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

## How literally should we take these teachings?

Jesus' teachings may not seem practical. It's obvious that Jesus was upholding an ideal that is the complete opposite of selfishness, but was he speaking in hyperbole? Was he intentionally exaggerating in order to make a point? That's possible. I doubt Jesus expects his followers to walk around shirtless or with two black eyes. I don't think he expects us to go empty our bank accounts when a homeless person on the corner holds up a cardboard sign. There's a difference between being a total patsy and having a loving, generous spirit.

But let's not get too comfortable. Jesus clearly expected his followers to do more than they were accustomed to doing, and I suspect he expects more of us, as well. Most of us don't get punched in the face very often. We rarely have someone ask for the shirt off of our backs.

I suspect Jesus was more concerned about relationships than finances. In every situation, Jesus expects us to think of what the other person needs, not just what we need, and to do what we can to help that other person. He calls us to be so generous of spirit that we show grace to every person we meet.

Often what others need most is not material goods or a chance to hit us again: what they need most is forgiveness, or understanding, or acceptance. Few things in this world are harder than to love someone who hates us, or to forgive someone who has hurt us. It just doesn't seem natural. But what Jesus teaches here is that what seems natural is not necessarily what is best. For Christian people, *our* actions and attitudes are not to be determined by the actions and attitudes of someone else.

We should not let someone else's negative behavior make us negative. We should not let others' hostility make us hostile. We should not let someone else's insensitivity make us insensitive, or let their meanness make us mean. Even though we may *be* victims of others' actions, we are not required to live as victims, or to continue being victimized by living with a cancerous grudge.

What an incredible thought! God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked – and God calls us to act in the same way. That may not seem fair to us, and we may think it is not fair of God to expect us to act the same way. *But if God were not kind to the ungrateful and the wicked, if God were not merciful, then where would we be?*

But God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked, and because of that, Jesus came into the world and allowed ungrateful and wicked people to treat him terribly and then hang him on a cross, and just before he breathed his last, he had the love and the courage to forgive them.

## The Hardest Question *continued*

Now, it may seem to us that forgiving someone who has hurt us or being kind to someone who hates us is impossible, but Jesus insisted that nothing is impossible with God. We can be merciful, even as our Father in heaven is merciful.

We may not always feel like being merciful, but it's important to remember that love and forgiveness are *actions*, not just *feelings*. We can *act* in a merciful and loving way, even when we don't *feel* very kind toward the one who has hurt us.

It sounds radical, but Jesus insisted that we should not base our love and generosity on whether others are loving and generous. Rather, we love others – even when it seems crazy – because that is what Jesus does, and what he has called us to do. That is who God is and who God calls his children to be. Loving. Forgiving. Even to those who don't deserve it.

Really.