

THE DAILY READING BIBLE

Volume 1

MATTHEW 5-6 JOSHUA 1 CORINTHIANS 1-4

The Daily Reading Bible (Volume 1)

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INTRODUCTION

Readng our Bibles regularly is getting harder. That, at least, seems to be the common experience of many Christians. We could waste lots of ink speculating on the reasons for this: is it the frenetic pace of life these days? Is it spiritual laziness? Is it the impact of postmodernism on our culture and the lack of certainty when it comes to interpreting the written word?

But a better option than speculating on the reasons, we thought, was to provide a new resource for Christians to help them get back into a more regular habit of reflecting daily on God's word. So back in June 2001, we decided to start including a section called 'Bible Brief' in our monthly magazine, *The Briefing* (see www.matthiasmedia.com.au for more information about *The Briefing*). The 'Bible Brief' provided 20 short readings each month—acknowledging that there will be days we miss or days when we want to do something a bit different—with questions, thoughts to ponder, and suggestions to get started in prayer.

Now, some three years later, we have a good collection of 'Bible Briefs', and it's time to offer them to a wider audience in a format that will, we hope, be even more convenient and useful.

This first volume contains 60 readings, all designed to be done in 15–20 minutes. These short daily Bible readings are designed to help you feed regularly from God's word. They

won't cover every issue in each passage, nor even every passage from each Bible book. In other words, *they are no substitute for the in-depth study of the Scriptures* that you may undertake personally, in small groups or through listening to sermons.

With the kind permission of our friends at Crossway Bibles, we've been able to make this a complete package to take with you—we've included the English Standard Version Bible text with each daily study. So you can take this one book with you and have everything you need—on the train, on the bus, or to the park at lunchtime—wherever and whenever you can get 20 minutes to yourself.

How to use these readings

- *With a penitent heart*, the true prerequisite for all Bible reading. Open with prayer (perhaps using the prayer suggested at the beginning of each set of studies).
- *With 15–20 minutes* of peace and quiet. If you can take longer, and want to read and pray further—great! But we have designed the readings to be done in a fairly short space of time.
- *With an accurate modern translation*. We recommend and have included the new ESV translation. The writers of the studies refer to this translation. Contact us for further details about the ESV or visit www.matthiasmedia.com.au/ESV

- *With a pen.* Even if you only jot down brief ideas, writing focuses the mind.
- *As a guide and help, not a straitjacket.* Feel free to dig further into the passage, to notice and ponder things that the questions don't point to.
- *As a launch-pad for prayer.* Use the prayer ideas at the end of each reading as a starting point for your daily prayer. Many of the points that will arise from the readings will be things you can pray for yourself, and also for others (family, friends, neighbours, etc.). Why not compile a list of people you want to pray for (you can write them in the blank space below), and use the prayer ideas from each reading to pray for the next person on your list?

This first volume includes studies on Matthew 5-6 (written by Rory Shiner, who, at the time of writing, was an editor at Matthias Media), the book of Joshua (written by Tim Thorburn, a staffworker with the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students in Perth), and 1 Corinthians 1-4 (written by the staff team at Christ Church, Gladesville, in Sydney).

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Please note: the main section of Scripture for each study is reproduced before the questions. Other Scripture references are reproduced as footnotes at the bottom of the page, or, where the passages are too long to be included as footnotes, in the Appendix.

PEOPLE TO PRAY FOR:

MATTHEW 5-6

INTRODUCTION

Showers are good for getting you through the week. They're quick, efficient, and do the basic job of getting you clean. However, for a deep cleansing it is hard to beat a good, long bath. A long soak gives you a clean that a shower just never can.

In this month's Bible Brief, we will be spending the whole month in just two chapters of the Bible—Matthew 5 and 6 (the first part of the Sermon on the Mount). In a way that many of us aren't used to, we will be bathing in these two chapters of the Bible, taking a good long soak in a part of Scripture so sharp, so winsome and yet so unsettling that we need to slow right down to let it do its work. But a warning—this isn't a bath full of perfumed lotions and scented candles. Rather, it's a bath with a good dose of antiseptic in it—parts of this are going to sting like crazy. But hang in there, that stinging feeling just means it's doing you good.

Here's an opening prayer you might like to use before each of the next 20 studies:

My God and Father,

Thank you that these words of Christ have been preserved for our learning. I pray now that you will give me the courage to hear these words again; that this sermon may soak into my life and character, so that its speaker may be honoured and glorified in my life. Amen.

NB: Tick the box when you've completed each study ✓

READING 1

MATTHEW 4:23-5:1



And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

^{5:1} Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

1. According to these verses, what sorts of things has Jesus been doing up to this

point? What picture do they give you of Jesus?

2. What do the crowds seem to want from him (v. 24)?
3. Where are the people from? Why do you think Matthew might have wanted us to know that?

POINTER The place names in these verses strongly suggest that Gentiles were among the crowds coming to Jesus. The place of the nations is an important theme in Matthew. If you want to follow this up, see Matthew 10:5-6¹ and 28:19.²

PONDER Which of these issues (sickness, disease, spiritual issues) have concerned you

recently? What do these verses tell us about Jesus' capacity to deal with them?

PRAYER IDEAS Thank God for sending the Messiah, first to Israel and now (in the gospel) to the nations. Thank God that his power will one day be exerted over all evil and trouble in this world. Pray that his kingdom will come soon.

READING 2

MATTHEW 5:1-2

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

1. *Remember from yesterday why the people were coming to him. What does he now do for them?*
2. *What might be the significance of his going "up on the mountain"? (Think about what else has happened on mountains in the Bible.)*
3. *Matthew 5:1 tells us that Jesus is speaking to his disciples, but the crowds*

are listening in. Go to Matthew 7:28-29³ to see their reaction to what they hear. How does the fact that the sermon is spoken to outsiders affect the way you understand its purpose?

PONDER Notice that this sermon is given to his disciples after they have been called by him (see 4:18-22⁴). They are taught how to live only after he has chosen them and made them his. Did God choose you ahead of your obedience? (See Eph 1:3-8.⁵)

PRAYER IDEAS Thank God that you have been made a disciple of Jesus by his grace. Pray that as you begin to look at the sermon itself, you will be given the strength to obey it in response to God's kindness to you.

1. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁴but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
2. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...
3. And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.
4. While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.
5. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ...

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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

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

⁵"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

1. *What does the word 'blessed' mean? Can you think of another word that captures the idea?*
2. *What do you think is meant by being poor in spirit, mourning and meekness? How might they relate to each other, that is, how might a poor spirit lead to mourning and to meekness?*
3. *What are the promises Jesus gives to people with these characteristics? How do the promises relate to the characteristics?*

POINTER When reading the Sermon on the Mount, watch out for the two words 'but' and 'for', because they will often unlock the logic of what Jesus is saying. In the next few readings, 'for' (meaning 'because') is the one to watch for.

It might sound like there are eight different people being talked about in these verses; the poor are one group, the hungry a different group, etc. However, it is better to understand them as eight descriptions of the one person. When you see it this way, it makes sense because someone who is poor in spirit will be someone who mourns their spiritual poverty, and will therefore hunger and thirst for righteousness and so on.

PONDER We are about to embark on reading through the most morally exacting sermon ever given. Why do you think Jesus began such a sermon talking about poorness in spirit, mourning and meekness?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that your life may begin to exhibit these characteristics. Consider where your hopes are currently placed and ask God to help you place your hope in his kingdom, his comfort and his inheritance.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

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

⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

1. *Notice in verse 6 it is not 'the righteous' who are blessed, but those who hunger*

and thirst for righteousness. Why is this a blessed state to be in?

2. *What is mercy (v. 7)? How does mercy differ from justice?*

3. "Pure" (v. 8) can either refer to moral purity or purity of purpose. Which do you think is on view here? Why?

4. A 'son' (v. 9) shares a likeness with his father. Which likeness is on view in verse 9? What does it teach us about God's character?

PONDER C.S. Lewis once said, "it would seem from the Gospels that our desires are not too strong, but too weak ... we are far too easily pleased". What sorts of strong desires do these verses commend to us? Is your heart set on the sorts of things promised here?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that your life will be full of strong, insatiable desires—for righteousness, for purity of heart, for mercy. Thank God for his promise to give you your heart's desire in these matters.

READING 5

MATTHEW 5:10-12

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

1. Notice the change in address from verse 10 to verse 11 (from "those" to "you"). How does that affect the way you read it?

2. In verse 10, what are they persecuted for? What might that mean?

3. In verse 11, why are they persecuted?

4. On what basis can they (or you) "rejoice and be glad"?

POINTER If you are not experiencing persecution, it may just be that God is being kind to you at the moment. Don't go looking for it. In fact, the Bible tells us to pray that it won't happen (1 Tim 2:1-2^a). However, if your Christian life never seems to rub up against the world it is worth at least asking if something is amiss in your obedience.

PONDER If Jesus' logic here is correct, how might you account for not being persecuted?

PRAYER IDEAS If these verses ring true for your present experience, pray that you might know the hope of these words. If not, prayerfully consider why that is. Pray for boldness to live righteously and for Jesus sake. Pray also for those you know who are experiencing persecution.

6. First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ^a for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.