

CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION  
Lenten Small Group Study Guide  
*The Cost of Discipleship*  
II. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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**Matthew 7:24-29**

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

**Chapter Six: The Beatitudes**

- What does “blessed” mean? It is often used as a translation for a Hebrew word meaning “deeply happy.” The disciples are blessed because:
  - They are “poor in spirit;” giving up everything for the sake of the call.
  - They “mourn” for the world in its lost state.
  - They are “meek,” leaving their rights and protection to God.
  - They “hunger” for perfect union with the Father.
  - They are “merciful,” having an irresistible love for the downtrodden.
  - They are “pure in heart,” having surrendered completely to Jesus.
  - They are the “peacemakers,” enduring suffering rather than inflicting it on others.
  - They are “persecuted,” rejected for their message and works.
  - They have answered Jesus’ call.

QUESTIONS

1. How does Bonhoeffer set the stage for the Sermon on the Mount between Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd? Why does he take time writing about this? (pp. 105-106)
2. Bonhoeffer writes about the difference between “privation” and “renunciation.” Why? (p. 106)
3. What is the relation between the disciples and the people? (pp. 106-107)
4. How does the “Antichrist” talk about the poor? (p. 108)
5. Is there anything about Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of the beatitudes that you find surprising? (pp. 107-113)
6. Why is the fellowship of the beatitudes also the fellowship of the crucified? (pp. 113- 114)

**Chapter Seven: The Visible Community**

- “You are the salt of the earth” suggests at least three things – purity, preservation and flavor. Salt in the Roman world suggested purity because of the process of using sea water and the sun to acquire the salt. Salt was used to preserve meat. Salt loses itself in service to the object being salted, thus providing flavor.
- The salt metaphor grounds the disciples in reality. They have an earthly task to perform and cannot think only of heaven.
- The “light of the world” indicates that the life of the disciple must be visible. The good works of the disciples should be seen and should point to the source of their call, Jesus and the cross.

#### QUESTIONS

1. According to Bonhoeffer how exactly are disciples “salt” and “light”? (pp. 116-117)
2. What examples does Bonhoeffer offer as bushes that cause a disciple to hide? What other bushels do we use to hide our light? (p. 118)

#### **Chapter Eight: The Righteousness of Christ**

- The fundamental presupposition of the Sermon on the Mount is that Christ came to fulfill Old Testament law. Jesus alone fulfilled the Law because only he lived in perfect communion with God.
- Because the disciples are bound to Jesus, they must fulfill the Law as he does.
- “Better righteousness” than the Pharisees means following Christ in a real and active faith in Jesus’ righteousness. Jesus has given us a new Law, the Law of Christ.

#### QUESTIONS

1. What is the “fundamental presupposition of the Sermon on the Mount”? (p. 122)
2. How is the righteousness of the disciples better than the righteousness of the Pharisees? (pp. 124-125)

#### **Chapter Nine: The Brother**

- For the Christian, there can be no one who does not qualify as brother or neighbor, unless the Lord should so judge.
- Anger itself is an attack on a brother’s life and aims at the brother’s destruction.
- When a person gets angry and swears at a brother, or insults him in public, or slanders him, he or she is guilty of murder and so renounces the connection to God.
- We must be reconciled with our brother to follow Jesus and worship God.

#### QUESTIONS

1. According to Bonhoeffer how do we determine who is our neighbor? Is this realistic? (p. 127)
2. How has the Church failed to recognize the “brother”? (pp. 128-129)

## Chapter Ten: Woman

- The Christian must exercise control over desire because even the desire of the moment is a barrier to discipleship.
- Desire can bring the whole body into hell, leading us to sell our Christian birthright for a “mess of pottage.”
- Christ bids us to look at him, and in so doing, our gaze will always be pure, even when looking a person of the opposite sex.

### QUESTIONS

1. Are we to take Jesus’ commands in Matthew 5:27-32 literally? What does Bonhoeffer think? What do you think? (p. 132)
2. What does it mean to say our bodies belong to Christ? (p. 133)

## Chapter Eleven: Truthfulness

- When Jesus said, “Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no,’” he meant that disciples are accountable for every word they speak because all are spoken in his presence.
- Bonhoeffer took time to single out the oath of allegiance on page 137. No doubt that he had Hitler in mind.

### QUESTIONS

1. How have Christians interpreted Jesus’ teaching on oaths? And what is different about Jesus’ teaching from the Old Testament? (pp. 135-136)
2. Does Bonhoeffer think we should take oaths administered by the state? (pp. 137-138)
3. The cross is a theme in all of these chapters. How does truth relate to the cross? (pp. 138-139)

## Chapter Twelve: Revenge

- As followers of Jesus, Christians give up for his sake “every personal right.”
- The right way to requite evil is not by resisting it. The only way to overcome evil is to let it run itself to a standstill because it does not find the resistance it is looking for.

### QUESTIONS

1. Bonhoeffer believes that we shouldn’t resist evil. Do you agree? Do you think there should be exceptions? Is there a distinction between “non-resistance” as Bonhoeffer defines it and non-violent resistance? (pp. 141-144)
2. Why was the “old Israel” justified in meeting force with force? (p. 141)
3. What does Bonhoeffer say about doing violence in the name of the state? Is it possible? (p. 143)
4. What’s the relationship between the cross and non-violence? (pp. 144-145)

### **Chapter Thirteen: The Enemy – the Extraordinary**

- The whole Sermon on the Mount is summed up in the word “love.”
- For the disciples, the enemies were those who accused them of undermining the Jewish faith, of transgressing the Law.
- Other enemies saw the disciples as dangerous revolutionaries to be destroyed.
- This is a love that gives itself for the good of the recipient (agape).

#### QUESTIONS

1. Who does Bonhoeffer say is our enemy? (pp. 147-148)
2. How does love conquer? (pp. 150-151)
3. What does Bonhoeffer mean when he says Christians must be “peculiar” and “extraordinary”? (pp. 152-154)

### **Chapter Fourteen: The Hidden Righteousness**

- The disciples are told that they can possess the “extraordinary” only so long as they are reflective: they must beware how they use it, and never fulfill it simply for its own sake, or for the sake of ostentation.
- From whom are we to hide the visibility of our discipleship? We are to hide it from ourselves.
- The disciple of Jesus acts simply in obedience to Jesus. That is, they regard the “extraordinary” as the natural fruit of obedience.
- All that the follower of Jesus has to do is to make sure that their obedience, following and love are entirely spontaneous and unpremeditated.

#### QUESTIONS

1. What is the paradox of Christian visibility? How is discipleship hidden yet visible? (pp. 157-158)
2. From whom do we hide our righteousness? (p. 158)
3. “The cross is at once the necessary, the hidden and the visible – it is the ‘extraordinary.’” What does Bonhoeffer mean by this? (p. 159)

### **Chapter Fifteen: The Hiddenness of Prayer**

- All Christian prayer is directed to God through a Mediator and not even prayer affords direct access to the Father.
- We can put on a very nice show (prayer performance) for ourselves even in the privacy of our own room. Having contrived our own reward of publicity, we substitute this satisfaction for prayer answered by God.
- The essence of Christian prayer is not general adoration but definite, concrete petition.
- Jesus told his disciples not only how to pray but also what to pray. The Lord’s Prayer is not merely the pattern prayer, it is the way Christians must pray.

- Everything depends on forgiveness of sin of which the disciples may only partake within the fellowship of sinners.

#### QUESTIONS

1. What makes prayer possible in the first place? (p. 162)
2. Why does Bonhoeffer say prayer has no “direct effect on the world”? (p. 163)
3. How do we avoid watching ourselves in prayer? (p. 164)

#### **Chapter Sixteen: The Hiddenness of the Devout Life**

- Jesus takes it for granted that his disciples will observe the pious custom of fasting.
- If there is no element of asceticism in our lives; we shall find it hard to train for the service of Christ.
- The real difference in the believer is that they are more clearly aware than other people of the rebelliousness and perennial pride of the flesh; they are conscious of their own sloth and self-indulgence.
- Jesus bids his disciples to persevere in the practices of humiliation (humility?) but not to force them on other people as a rule or regulation.

#### QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of asceticism? (p. 169)
2. How do we sometimes make excuses for avoiding asceticism? (p. 170)
3. What is the problem with seeing asceticism solely in terms of imitating Christ? (p. 171)

#### **Chapter Seventeen: The Simplicity of the Carefree Life**

- The life of discipleship can only be maintained so long as nothing is allowed to come between Christ and ourselves – neither the law, nor personal piety, nor even the world.
- Worldly possessions tend to turn the hearts of the disciples away from Jesus.
- Jesus does not forbid the possession of property in itself.
- Earthly goods are given to be used, not to be collected.
- The way to misuse our possessions is to use them as insurance against the future.

#### QUESTIONS

1. Bonhoeffer came from privilege. How can he say what he says about the idolatry of possessions? (pp. 173-175)
2. Why is being “carefree” not a philosophy of life or a moral law? (pp. 178-179)

#### **Chapter Eighteen: The Disciple and Unbelievers**

- When we judge other people, we confront them in a spirit of detachment, observing and reflecting as it were from the outside. But love has neither time nor opportunity for this.

- The love of Christ for the sinner in itself is the condemnation of sin, is his expression of extreme hatred of sin. The disciples of Christ are to love unconditionally.
- Judgment is the forbidden objectivization of the other person which destroys single-minded love.
- By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are.
- If when we judged others, our real motive was to destroy evil, we should look for evil where it is certain to be found, and that is in our own hearts.
- The disciple will look upon other men as forgiven sinners who owe their lives to the love of God.

#### QUESTIONS

1. How does the Christian avoid a “superior attitude”? (p. 183)
2. How does Bonhoeffer think it possible to love the sinner and yet hate the sin? Is he convincing here? (p. 184)
3. How should Christians see their neighbors? (p. 185)
4. What’s the difference between the gospel and ideology? (p. 186)

#### **Chapter Nineteen: The Great Divide**

- The church of Jesus cannot arbitrarily break off all contact with those who refuse his call.
- To be called to a life of extraordinary quality, to live up to it, and yet to be unconscious of it is indeed a narrow way. (This is discipleship!)
- We can never appeal to our confession or be saved simply on the ground that we have made it. Neither is the fact that we are members of a Church which has a right confession a claim to God’s favor. God will not ask us if we were good Protestants, but whether we have done God’s will.

#### QUESTIONS

1. What creates the separation between the world and the Church? (p. 190)
2. Bonhoeffer says twice that a person may not know that he or she is a “false prophet” or a “nominal” Christian? Is that true? How then can we tell whether if we’re true disciples? (pp. 191-192)
3. What is the “crucial question”? (p. 195)

#### **Chapter Twenty: Conclusion**

- We could understand and interpret the Sermon on the Mount in a thousand different ways. Jesus knows only one possibility: simple surrender and obedience.
- If we start asking questions, posing problems and offering interpretations, we are not doing His word.

#### QUESTION

1. What does Bonhoeffer mean when he says we shouldn't interpret the Sermon on the Mount, just obey it? (p. 196-197)