

THE GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL LIFE

Putting on the Character of Christ



The Good and Beautiful Life Guide
Putting on the Character of Christ

Week 1: Learning to Live Without Anger

Social Time and Catch-up (20 mins)

Opening Prayer

Series Introduction

Everybody wants to be happy, but the problem is that many of us don't know what happiness truly is. In Jesus' Sermon On The Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus talked about what it looks like to live a happy and blessed life - a "Good and Beautiful Life" where we are transformed and take on the character of Christ. The question is, how? How can we be happy? How can we be transformed? What are some key behaviours and practices that we need to engage in, in order to become like Christ? Join us this fall at The Gathering as we talk through the Sermon on the Mount and how, by God's grace, we can experience "The Good and Beautiful Life" together. (NOTE: This series is based on James Bryan Smith's book, "The Good and Beautiful Life.")

Group Discussion (40 mins)

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

Key Text:

"You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell."

(Matthew 5:21-22, NLT)

1. James Bryan Smith, in *The Good and Beautiful Life*, suggests that anger is caused by unmet expectations mixed with fear. Is there a time in your own life where you can see a time where you were filled with anger due to your expectations not being met or because of fear?
2. False narratives can cause so many of our problems. When paired with anger, they have an imperative quality that implies control and command. It usually accompanies words like *must, always and never*. Which false imperative narratives do you struggle with (examples below)? How does it lead to anger?



- I am alone.
 - Things always have to go as I want them.
 - Something terrible will happen if I make a mistake.
 - I must be in control all of the time.
 - Life must always be fair and just.
 - I need to anticipate everything that will happen to me today.
 - I need to be perfect all the time.
3. What relationship is being developed between anger and murder in Matthew 5:21-22? How is Jesus reframing people's understanding of righteousness?
 4. Jesus' narrative confronts our false imperative narratives. Inside the kingdom of God, life is different. God is with us, protecting us and fighting for our well-being. How does trust in God and His character diffuse our anger? Do you have a story from your own life that you are comfortable sharing of anger diminishing as you became aware that God loved you and was for your good?
 5. There are also times when it is right to be angry. Smith says, "Righteous anger consists in getting angry at the things that anger God, and then seeking a proper remedy to correct the wrong" (p. 78). Describe a time you felt your anger was righteous.

Reflection: Exploring Anger (20 minutes)

Give the group time to personally reflect on the following questions. They may want to journal their answers. People only need to share if they are comfortable.

1. List two or three times when you were angry during the last few weeks.
2. Identify the unmet expectations and fears that were at work for each item on your list.
3. What false imperative narratives (p. 73 in *The Good and Beautiful Life*) were at work within you?

Examples of false imperative narratives are:

- "I am alone."
- "Things always have to go as I want them."
- "Something terrible will happen if I make a mistake."
- "I must be in control all of the time."
- "Life must always be fair and just."
- "I need to anticipate everything that will happen to me today."
- "I need to be perfect all of the time."

4. What does it look like to respond appropriately in the future?

Group Application Practice: Introduce Sabbath (10 minutes)

Keeping the Sabbath is a practice that helps us better deal with our anger. Sabbath is about combating our expectations and fears through trusting God, surrendering control and rest.

“Sabbath keeping is the linchpin of a life lived in sync with the rhythms that God Himself built into our world, and yet it is the discipline that seems hardest for us to live. Sabbath keeping honours the body’s need for rest, the spirit’s need for replenishment and the soul’s need to delight itself in God for God’s own sake. It begins with willingness to acknowledge the limits of our humanness and then to take steps to live more graciously within the order of things.” - Ruth Haley Barton

How can you practice Sabbath this week?

Here are some tips (p. 82-83):

- Take time to plan your sabbath. Which day will you do it? What will you do? What will you eat?
- Start in the evening with a special meal for you, your family and friends.
- Light a candle or two at the centre of the table when everyone has come to the table. Say a prayer.
- During the meal, bless one another. What do you appreciate about one another?
- Play games!
- Eat great food that you love.
- Go to church together (if you choose Sunday as your sabbath).
- Try not to eat out. Prepare food ahead of time if possible.
- Nap!
- Set aside time for private prayer.
- Read a good devotional book or write in your journal.
- Express gratitude.
- Spend time reading the Bible.
- Practice hospitality. Invite friends to eat with you.

Prayer (30 minutes)



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Week 2: Learning to Live Without Lust

Social Time and Catch-up (20 mins)

Opening Prayer

Debrief Last Week's Soul Training Practice: Sabbath (10 minutes)

1. Were you able to keep sabbath this week? If so, describe what you did and how you felt about it. It is okay if you started small!
2. Were you able to see a connection between Sabbath and anger? If so, how are they related to you?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from taking Sabbath rest?

Group Discussion (50 mins)

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

Key Text:

“You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, 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. And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, 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 be thrown into hell.” (Matthew 5:27-30, NLT)

1. What messages have you heard at church about sex? If you've heard nothing, what is implied about sex when there is silence?
2. Lust is intentionally objectifying another person for one's own gratification. Jesus in Matthew 5 connects this with adultery. Do you agree or disagree with this comparison?
3. What are the consequences for lust listed in Matthew 5:27-30? Why does Jesus encourage people to react so strongly that they would gouge out eyes or cut off limbs?



4. Lust often involves objectifying a body. It can also be objectifying one's persona. This can be seen through romance novels or mental fantasies. Do you agree that lust can be more than just objectifying a body?
5. The cure to lust is found in Christ and in His Kingdom. It comes from knowing essential truths about ourselves and God:
 - In Christ we know who we are and whose we are. Our need for love, to feel special, important and sacred is met in Christ.
 - When I set my heart on the Kingdom of God, I discover that I am a part of a larger story that is thrilling and exciting. I have a role in the story and a place where I can direct my energy.
 - In the security of a good God who loves me, I can see others in a new way. I no longer see others as objects that can be exploited but as real people that God loves.

Has knowing these truths helped you in your own struggles with lust? Are there any truths that you would add?

6. Scripture teaches that our sexuality should be expressed within a committed marriage. Would you agree that it is important for a relationship to have a balance between the level of commitment and physical intimacy? Consequently, a relationship with no commitment should have no physical intimacy. As the level of commitment increases, then the physical intimacy can also increase. The two merge with the ultimate level of commitment being marriage and physical intimacy being sexual intercourse. Do you agree?

Group Application Practice: Introduce Media Fast (10 minutes)

We live in a sexually saturated culture. The challenge to address lust this week is to do a 48 hour media fast. This includes:

- The Internet
- Television
- Newspapers and magazines
- Radio stations
- Video games
- iPods, mp3 players and stereos



“In a world where people use the Internet an average of 30 hours a week and keep the TV or radio on 7.9 hours a day, we need to get unplugged from virtual reality and address our addiction to technology and the toxins it brings into our lives. Unplug, and look into the eyes of another human face - see the beauty of God’s Creation!”- Adele Calhoun

What will you do with your time? How will you entertain yourself?

Suggestions:

- Play a board game
- Read a book
- Go for a walk
- Connect with a friend
- Exercise

It may feel difficult. Remember though, if you are able to fulfill this challenge, it can give you hope that you can also learn to say no to lust.

Prayer (30 minutes)

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Week 3: Learning to Live Without Lying

Social Time and Catch-up (20 mins)

Opening Prayer

Debrief Last Week's Soul Training Practice: Media Fast (10 minutes)

1. Were you able to fast from media for 48 hours this week? If so, describe what you did and how you felt about it.
2. Did you see a connection between fasting from media and lust? If so, how are they related to you?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the media fast?

Group Discussion (50 mins)

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

Key Text:

33 "You have also heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the Lord.' 34 But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne. 35 And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is His footstool. And do not say, 'By Jerusalem!' for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. 36 Do not even say, 'By my head!' for you can't turn one hair white or black. 37 Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one. (Matthew 5:33-37)

James Bryan Smith describes lying as "a false statement made knowingly, with the intent to deceive" (p 112). Lying is not just about the correctness of what a person says. Lying is about the intent of the heart.

1. We lie for many different reasons or in different contexts. Have you ever told any of these common lies?
 - Yes, I have read that book (or seen that movie).



- Yes, let's definitely get together soon.
- He's in a meeting.
- I'm busy that day.
- She's not home.
- No, that outfit doesn't make you look fat.

What are other lies that you tell that seem harmless?

2. We often lie for two main reasons, "to get what we want" or "to avoid something we don't want". These responses are rooted in fear. If you are comfortable sharing, discuss what motive is most common for you? Are there other common lies that you would add?
3. The standard in Jesus' time was that you could tell lies, but if you lied under oath you were guilty. Jesus (in Matthew 5:33-37) calls us to aim higher. He asks people to not make oaths and always aim to be truthful. Do you relate to what Jesus is saying? Do you seek to always tell the truth or do you only speak honestly when it is clear that it is a serious situation, like being under oath?
4. Kingdom people are filled with the Holy Spirit and therefore filled with truth. How does living in the Kingdom set us free from fear and give us a secure identity? How does that help us to let go of falsehood and lying?

Group Application Practice: Introduce Silence (10 minutes)

Practicing the discipline of silence is thought to help us learn how to control our tongues, directly combating sins like gossip or lying. The challenge this week is to engage in silence.

"It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am the more affection I have for them... Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are, not for what they say." - Thomas Merton

Option 1: Going A Day Without Words

It is likely easier to do this on a weekend if you work throughout the week. Some helpful pointers.

1. Give family and friends ample warning that you are thinking of doing this practice to give them context in case they cannot reach you.
2. If you are asked to speak and it is beneficial to do so, then do.
3. If you must communicate during your time of silence with a few people, leave a notepad and a pen in a place that is accessible.

Option 2: Going A Day Without Lying



Do your best not to lie to people for an entire day. If you do lie, try to correct it immediately on the spot. Most people will find your honesty refreshing and will not get angry or annoyed when you correct yourself.

Prayer (30 minutes)

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Week 4: Learning to Bless Those Who Curse Us

Social Time and Catch-up (20 mins)

Opening Prayer

Debrief Last Week's Soul Training Practice: Silence. Going A Day Without Words or Lying (10 minutes)

1. Which of the two exercises did you attempt to do this week; a day without words or a day without lying? Describe what you tried and how it went.
2. What did you learn about God or about yourself from these exercises?
3. Think back to the spiritual practices from the previous weeks. Are you still practicing any of these disciplines? How are they affecting you?

Group Discussion (50 mins)

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

Key Text:

“You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don’t turn away from those who want to borrow.” (Matthew 5:38-42, NLT)

1. The culture at the time of Jesus followed a law of reciprocity. If someone hurt another, they should be hurt in a similar way; fracture for a fracture, tooth for a tooth, eye for an eye (Lev 24:19-20). How does this cultural background enhance our understanding of what Jesus says?
2. Jesus says that if our shirt is taken from us, we should give our coat too. Is this commandment now a new law? How are we to understand it?

3. How does living in God's Kingdom make it possible to follow this teaching? What beliefs about God are necessary to underpin these types of behaviours?
4. When Jesus instructs us to "Love our Enemies", what comes to mind? How do you feel about this commandment?
5. Kingdom Identity (I am one in who Christ dwells) and kingdom awareness (I am in the strong and secure kingdom of God) are the keys to doing what Jesus calls us to do according to James Bryan Smith. Reflecting on Matthew 5:38-48, what are modern examples of situations that would be similar to the ones Jesus uses? How might a follower of Christ respond?

Group Application Practice: Praying for the Success of Competitors (10 minutes)

We may not be slapped or sued this week but many of us can grow in how we view or treat those who are a threat to us. Jesus calls us to bless those who harm us.

"When we love, forgive and commit ourselves to pray, it connects our hearts with the Father's heart, filling us with His compassion." - Sara Maynard

Think of someone who might be your enemy - someone who is actively pursuing your demise. You may be hard-pressed to come up with an authentic enemy.

If you are not able to come up with a clear enemy, instead pray for the success of a competitor. A competitor is anyone you are measured against and whose success in some way diminishes your own.

If you are not able to identify a competitor, pray for someone who is difficult to love in your life for whatever reason.

Here are a few tips to help you as you do this practice:

- Spend a few minutes each day praying for your competitor, asking God to bless him or her and the work he or she does.
- Hold that person or institution up before God, and pray for as many good things to happen as you can think of.
- Do this once a day for four or five days this week. See if your heart begins to change towards this person.

Prayer (30 minutes)



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Week 5: Learning to Live Without Vainglory

Social Time and Catch-up (20 mins)

Opening Prayer

Debrief Last Week's Soul Training Practice: Praying For Competitors (10 minutes)

1. What did you notice happening within you and around you as you prayed for the success of your competitors?
2. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?

Group Discussion (50 mins)

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

Key Text:

“Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don’t do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask Him!

And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18, NLT)

James Bryan Smith teaches that vainglory is the need to be thought well of by others and is driven by the notion that the opinions of others determines our worth. When this vice fully grows in our hearts, we become more interested in others opinions of us than actually being a genuine person or doing good for the sake of doing good.

1. The world measures our worth on the basis of our appearance, production and performance - which seem to be the only things that count. This worldview says that our value is determined by others assessments. How do you allow your value to be determined? (Can do in pairs for deeper sharing).
2. In Matthew 6, Jesus addresses three of the most spiritual activities a person could do; giving money to the poor, praying and fasting. Is He attacking the practices themselves? If not, what is He addressing?
3. Have you caught yourself doing a good deed in order to receive praise from others? What was the result?
4. What are your favourite spiritual practices? Take a moment to individually consider your heart and motives when practicing these things.
5. If you are longing for approval or praise through any of these practices, what can you do to purify your motives regarding these disciplines? Does the change of motives change how you practice these things?

Group Application Practice: Secret Service (10 minutes)

This week engage in things that will lift someone else's burden. If you can, try to do five different intentional acts of kindness and sensible acts of beauty, but they must be done in secret. It may be impossible to hide what we have done, and do not lie if it is found out but try not to draw attention to what we have done. Try to not give money but to keep acts of service on the non monetary level, engaging our time and our energy.

“When we set out on a consciously chosen course of action that accents the good of others and is, for the most part, a hidden work, a deep change occurs in our spirits.”-
Richard Foster



Examples:

- Do someone's laundry
- Fill someone's car with gas.
- Clean someone's room
- Help put up wallpaper
- Drive someone to where he or she needs to go
- Listen to someone
- Serve a meal at a shelter
- Help a child with their homework
- Borrow a car and clean it for them, inside and out.
- Make someone a meal.
- Ask God to send you someone in need.

Prayer (30 minutes)

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Week 6: Learning to Live Without Avarice

Social Time and Catch-up (20 mins)

Opening Prayer

Debrief Last Week's Soul Training Practice: Secret Service (10 minutes)

1. Were you able to do any acts of service? What was the most challenging aspect of serving in secret?
2. How did you feel as you were doing your secret acts of service? How did you feel after they were finished?
3. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself from this exercise?

Group Discussion (50 mins)

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

Key Text:

“Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. “Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!” (Matthew 6:19-23, NLT)

We are all stewards of the money that God has given us or that we have earned. The main question is what we are going to do with it, are we investing in earthly or heavenly treasures?

1. Have you ever desperately wanted something that you could not wait to eventually own? How did you feel once you had it? What eventually happened to it?
2. Our childhoods and experiences are very influential in how we view the world. How has your childhood or family of origin affected how you interact with money?



3. Jesus says in Matthew 6:21 that wherever our treasure is, there the desires of our heart will be as well. What is Jesus saying about our relationship with money?
4. Jesus talks about the eye as a lamp to the body (Matt 6:22). What do you think He is saying here? How does it relate to the passage before about money?
5. What difference does the gospel message that Jesus is King, has died and rose again; make in our relationship with money?

Group Application Practice: Deaccumulation (10 minutes)

The challenge this week is to give away things that are of value that we think could be used by someone else. If you have something nice that you think someone would appreciate, bless them with it.

“Jesus wants us to know that we don’t *need* all the things or experiences we think we do. What we really need is to keep things first - Jesus and His kingdom.” - Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

Most people struggle with letting go of things. Some of us have very little and will have to think wisely about whether or not they should give things away and what. Some people have a lot. It will take some time to sort through things to find what may be of value that they can give.

The goal is to give away five things this week without just automatically going out and buying something to replace it. Ask God to show you who to bless with what. Trust God to bless you as you let go of possessions and de-accumulate.

Prayer (30 minutes)

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Week 7: Learning to Live Without Worry

Social Time and Catch-up (20 mins)

Opening Prayer

Debrief Last Week's Soul Training Practice: Deaccumulation (10 minutes)

1. What challenges did you encounter as you gave away some of your possessions?
2. How did it feel after you gave the items away?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?

Group Discussion (50 mins)

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

Key Text:

“That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to Him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, He will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.



So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." (Matthew 6:25-34, NLT)

1. How does life in the Kingdom of God help us live without worry?
2. Our culture sometimes does not help us live without worry. What fears do the media play on? How does the media use our fears to shape their messages?
3. What is Jesus calling us not to worry about in Matthew 6:25-34? How would trusting God in these areas help us live our life to the fullest?
4. How would trusting God for our basic needs set us apart from our culture?
5. Jesus says to "seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously" (Matt 6:33). What does that mean? Would that look like in your own life?
6. Why is Jesus calling us to live in the moment and only focus on today (Matt 6:34)? What is the problem with worrying about tomorrow? Is this practice different from what you learned from your family or your culture?

Group Application Practice: Prayer (10 minutes)

There is a strong connection between prayer and worry. Paul says:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7, NLT)

Here are some practices you can use to help you turn your concerns and worries over to God:

- Each morning try to set aside 10 or 15 minutes to pray.
- Think about all of the things you might be anxious about.
- Write your concerns down in your journal.
- Meditate on what control you have and any steps you can take to remedy each of these situations.
- Write down the things that you can do and make a plan to do them.
- Turn everything else over to God.
- Write specific prayers about each concern, requesting for God to specifically meet you where you need Him.

Remember to be specific in your prayers.



“Most of our prayers are so vague that we would not even know if God had answered them.” -James Bryan Smith

Prayer helps us believe that God will be faithful to provide for us in our areas of worry. It also helps us to see things from God’s perspective, ordering our concerns and problems in their rightful place.

May you see God answer some of your prayers this week and experience your worries diminish as you see God’s great power and love through prayer.

Prayer (30 minutes)

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Week 8: Learning to Live Without Judging Others

Social Time and Catch-up (20 mins)

Opening Prayer

Debrief Last Week's Soul Training Practice: Prayer (10 minutes)

1. Did you see the Kingdom of God at work in the areas where you prayed? How?
2. Did praying through your worries result in greater peace? If so, how did it affect you?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself through this exercise?

Group Discussion (50 mins)

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

Key Text:

“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.

And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.”
(Matthew 7:1-5, NLT)

1. Give an example of when this has happened to you - either when you were judging or were judged.
2. What do you think the log in our own eye is that the text is referring to? Is it sin? Is it the act of judging someone in the first place?
3. What is usually our motive for judging others? Is it to control or change others? Is it to try to feel better about yourself?

4. Has there been a time where you have felt more connected to the Kingdom of God and therefore less judgmental to others?
5. What does Jesus' life and example reveal to us about how He dealt with people's sin and faults? How has Jesus responded to you? How can we grow in a similar way?

Group Application Practice: A Day Without Gossip (10 minutes)

One of the most common ways we judge others is through gossip. Gossip can be defined as speaking negatively about someone who is not present.

“Refusing to gossip and trusting God to help us silence gossip as much as we can is one of the most loving things we can do for others.” - James Bryan Smith

This week try to go one to three days without gossiping. Try to simply walk away when people are engaging in gossip or try to change the subject.

Prayer (30 minutes)

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Week 9: Living In The Kingdom Day by Day

Social Time and Catch-up (20 mins)

Opening Prayer

Debrief Last Week's Soul Training Practice: A Day Without Gossip (10 minutes)

1. What struggles did you discover when you tried not to gossip?
2. How did your perspective of other people change during this exercise?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself through this exercise?

Key Text:

“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn’t obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.” (Matthew 7:24-27)

1. How does Jesus define wisdom and foolishness in Matthew 7? How does that compare with the culture’s definition of wisdom that you have learned?
2. According to Matthew 7, following Jesus’ teaching allows us to face life’s storms. Do you have an experience of how following scripture helped you through a difficult time in your own life?
3. Are there concrete steps that you can take in your life to help you build your spiritual house on Christ’s teachings? Are there specific practices from this series that you want to use to help you?
4. Why is it important to do what Jesus says? Is it not enough to just spend time with Him? What are the consequences of disobedience and the benefits of attempting to be obedient?

Group Application Practice: Maintaining Spiritual Disciplines (10 minutes)

“In order for a person to grow in a craft, she or he must create an ecosystem - an environment that fosters growth. Part of this ecosystem... will include *deliberate* practice. Our spiritual lives are no different. In order to thrive in our life with God we need a spiritual ecosystem that includes deliberate practice.”- Ken Shigematsu

1. Which practice from the series proved the most beneficial to you? How did it help you?
2. Is there a practice or a couple practices that you would like to integrate into your regular daily life? Which ones and why? What would that look like?
3. How can you continue to integrate the teachings of this series into your life to help you have a “Good and Beautiful Life”? Make a goal that is attainable and yet pushes you out of your normal rhythms right now.