Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule



Scripture Reference: Matthew chapters 5-7

Suggested Theme: Jesus teaches us God's ways, including to treat others as we treat ourselves.

Memory Verse: "Do for other people the same things you want them to do for you. This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets." Matthew 7:12, ICB

Story Overview:

Jesus preached many wonderful lessons in the Sermon on the Mount. The lessons were practical and applied to everyday life. One important thing that Jesus said in his sermon was to "do for other people the same things you want them to do for you." This is so valuable that it is often referred to as the "Golden Rule."

Background Study:

The Sermon on the Mount is filled with important teachings, but it would be too much to cover in one lesson. It is still helpful, however, to present the lesson today within the context of the full sermon. One way to do this is to list the five main points of the sermon as outlined below. Following this, return to the fourth point and cover the Golden Rule in more detail. As Jesus instructed,

> "Do for other people the same things you want them to do for you. This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets." Matthew 7:12, ICB

A negative form of the golden rule is found in Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. It was even found in Greek and Roman ethical teachings. But it is not enough to say, "Don't do to people the things that you don't like done to you." We could follow that advice by simply doing nothing. We could just avoid people altogether. Instead, Jesus stated the same thing but in a positive way: "Do to others." This requires us to interact with people. We must take positive action with those around us.

One way to divide the sermon in Matthew is as follows:

1. Be Lights in a Dark World (Matthew 5:1-16)

The first part of the sermon is referred to as the "beatitudes," which means being most blessed. Being blessed is more than just being happy. It is a spiritual mindset and sense of fulfilment that comes from choosing God's way in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. Jesus lists a number of difficult circumstances and the blessings that can come despite them.
This way of life does not just make our own lives better. Living according to God's instructions makes a real difference to the world around us. The section ends with Jesus saying, *"In the same way, you should be a*

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light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do. Live so that they will praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16, ICB) The lesson Jesus Teaches About Salt and Light covers this in more detail.

2. It's Not Just About Rules-Be Good Because God is Good (Matthew 5:17-48)

Jewish leaders of the day were making following God more about outward rules and regulations and not about obeying God from the heart. In this sermon, Jesus contrasts these two approaches and makes it clear that living in God's kingdom is not just about what people do or seem to do on the outside that matters. God wants our actions AND our hearts. This sermon is on a mountain. Because Jesus compares this new way of living to the Old Testament Laws, some people compare this part of the sermon to God giving the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

The section ends with *"So you must be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48 ICB)*. Of course, we are not perfect, but our eyes should be on the perfection of God, and this should be our example and aim.

3. Be Genuine-Obeying God is Not About Getting Attention (Matthew 6:1-18)

Jesus spends time talking about giving to those in need, praying and fasting. He speaks of hypocrites who make these acts of worship very public actions. Jesus points out that God is unseen and knows what goes on in secret. He says, *"Be careful! When you do good things, don't do them in front of people to be seen by them. If you do that, then you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:1, ICB)*

4. Real Treasure is Being with God. Live a Rich and Generous Life. (Matthew 6:19-7:12)

This portion of the sermon begins with *"Your heart will be where your treasure is." (Matthew 6:21, ICB)* How we view money and earthly possessions reveals what we value most. God's generous grace towards us inspires a generous grace in how we judge others. Jesus encourages his audience to draw upon God's generous nature and to be generous in how we treat others. At this point in the sermon, Jesus instructs them with what is known as the "Golden Rule" (THIS LESSON'S MAIN POINT)

5. Make the Wise Choice to Hear and Obey (Matthew 7:13-28)

Hearing Jesus' words is not enough. The teaching must be put into practice. The Sermon on the Mount ends with a choice between two gates. The wide gate seems easier, and many people choose it. Choosing the wide gate leads to destruction. Fewer people choose the narrow gate. The narrow gate is more difficult, but it leads to life.
Jesus warns us not to listen to "false prophets" who say things that might tempt us to make the wrong choice. They can be recognised as false by the way they say one thing and do another.

Finally, Jesus leaves the crowd with a parable about two builders. This is further explored in the lesson Parable of Wise and Foolish Builders.

Scholars have differing opinions concerning whether the sermon was preached in one sitting or if it is a collection of a few sermons or teachings of Jesus combined together. The gospel of Luke records Jesus saying many of the same things as in Matthew but in various settings and times. For example, our memory verse today is found both in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:12) and in the sermon in Luke 6:17-49. It would make sense that Jesus was repeating many of the same teachings to his various audiences.

Jesus taught about the kingdom of God and how to live in it. The sermon is not just about what to believe. It is practical and teaches how to live.

Way to Introduce the Story:

If possible, show the children something that is gold. This could be a ring or other jewellery. Talk about how precious gold is. Today's lesson concerns a time when Jesus preached a sermon. He said many good things.

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One of the things He said is so special that some people call it the “Golden Rule.”

The Story:

Once, when Jesus saw a crowd of people, He went up to the side of a mountain to teach them.

Teachers in those times usually sat down when they were teaching, so when Jesus sat down, the people gathered around him to hear what He had to say.

The people had heard other teachers and preachers, but they were amazed by what Jesus had said to them. They could tell that Jesus was speaking the truth. What Jesus said that day was so important that His sermon (or speech) was written down in our Bibles for all of us to read even many years later. Since He was speaking from the side of a mountain, people refer to what He said that day as “The Sermon on the Mount.”

Jesus was a good teacher. When people listened to Him, they learned many important things about God. But Jesus did not just talk about what people should know. He also taught people the best way to live. He taught about worshipping God, being kind to people, and helping others.

Let’s list some things Jesus discussed in the Sermon on the Mount.

Many people in the world do not know about God or follow him. When people do not follow God, it feels like the world is in darkness. But Jesus told His followers that they could be like a light in the dark world. If they obeyed God, then people could know the right things to do.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also talked about following rules. Other teachers had been saying that it made God happy if people obeyed all the rules. But Jesus said if a person only follows God’s rules on the outside but does not love Him on the inside, from their heart, then this actually makes God sad. God is our Heavenly Father, and we are His children. Children want to be like their fathers, so Jesus said, “Try to be good like God. Your Father is good!”

However, some religious leaders followed God’s rules just to get attention. They liked to do things like stand on a street corner and pray really loud so that everyone would hear them and think they were good. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that God can hear us pray, even if we whisper or go to a quiet place alone. In fact, anytime we do good things, God sees what is happening. We should do good things to make God happy and not just to show off to other people.

Another thing Jesus talked about in the Sermon on the Mount was treasure. Sometimes people worry about money, clothes, or food, but Jesus said that you are rich if you follow God! You have treasures in heaven waiting for you. People who think about earthly treasures get disappointed if the treasure gets lost or stolen. So which is more valuable, treasure on earth or treasure in heaven?

Jesus said that we would be sad if we always worried about things on earth. If we remember that we have treasure in heaven, we know that this treasure will last forever.

The last thing Jesus said in His sermon was about making a wise choice. He said there were two choices, and the choices were like gates. One gate is very wide and easy to go through. Most people chose this gate. They always do what is easy instead of what is good. The other gate is narrow and harder to go through. Not as many people choose to go through it. The people who go through the narrow gate are willing to do the right thing, even if it is difficult.

So where do you think the gates lead? Jesus said the wide gate leads to a life filled with destruction, and the narrow gate leads to a wonderful life that leads to an even better life someday with God. Which gate would you choose?

Jesus said many other important things in the Sermon on the Mount. There are so many things that it might be difficult to remember them all!

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Even if we don't remember everything Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, there is one thing that I would like us to try very hard to remember. If we remember this one thing Jesus said, then we will always know how to treat people. It is like a valuable rule that always works in any situation. It is so valuable that some people call it "The Golden Rule." Would you like to hear what the Golden Rule is? This is the golden rule that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount and at other times.

"Do for other people what you want them to do for you." Luke 6:31, ICB

The way you wish people would treat you is the way you should always treat them. Do you wish people were always kind to you? Then you should treat others with kindness.

Do you wish others told you the truth? Then you should be the kind of person that tells the truth.

What do you wish people would do for you if you were hurt or sad? Then, when we notice that someone is hurt or sad, what should we do for them?

If someone hurts us, we might feel like hurting them in return. But that is not the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule is that we only treat people like we wish to be treated. Jesus knew that following the Golden Rule would be difficult sometimes, but do you remember what He said about the gates? Choosing to follow the Golden Rule is like going through the narrow gate. It may be more difficult, but it will lead to the best life!

So now you know the story of the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule. And what is the Golden Rule?

top

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

top

Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- In what book of the Bible do you find the Sermon on the Mount? (Matthew)
- Who preached the Sermon on the Mount? (Jesus)
- Where did Jesus preach his sermon? (On a mountain)
- What is the "Golden Rule?" ("Do to others what you would have them do to you.")

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- Why did Jesus preach a sermon? (He wanted to teach people important things that would change their lives)
- What did you learn about God or Jesus from this story?
- What did you learn about people from this story?

Reflection:

- How many people do you think were in the crowd listening to Jesus' sermon?
- What do you think the mountain Jesus preached at looked like or felt like?
- How do you think Jesus felt when he was about to start preaching?
- What question do you have for God about this story?
- If you had known about Jesus back then, would you have wanted to hear his sermon? What would you hope he would preach about?
- When is it most difficult for you to treat other people like you want to be treated?
- Who do you struggle to show love to and treat them like you'd want to be treated? Why?
- What might help you start treating that person the way you'd want to be treated?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Love is Something If You Give It Away Song
- Ha-la-la-la Song
- I've Got Something in My Pocket Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

top

Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- In a nod to the location Jesus taught from, this would be a fun lesson to teach outside, on a hill. Even inside, children can take turns sitting in the same elevated position to say the memory verse.

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- Ask the children to share different places where they have heard sermons. Ask if they remember special things they might have heard. Share some of your own experiences.
- Before the session, cut paper into small “cards.” Use a crayon or glitter to draw a gold dot in the centre of some of the cards. Leave the others blank. Blue-tac the cards under the chairs before the children arrive for the session. For this activity, describe a situation and ask a child to reach under his/her chair to see which kind of card they have. If the card has a gold dot, then they should tell what should be done in the situation according to the golden rule. If their card is blank, then the child should say what a person might do if they did not follow the golden rule.
- Write the memory verse on a whiteboard or chalkboard. Ask the children to repeat the verse with you a few times. Erase one word and say the verse together again. Each time you repeat the verse, erase another word. Soon, all the words are erased, and the children know the verse by heart.
- Puppet Skit for Pre-schoolers: Try using simple finger puppets or soft toys for this cute application. Download this “Loving One Another Puppet Skit”, which was submitted by Jenny Ancell, Australia. You’ll just need to change the names of the brands and stores/shops to adapt to your situation.
- Collect a variety of shoes. This might include work boots, ballet slippers, baby shoes, sports shoes, etc. Children take turns standing in those shoes and talking about what that person might be feeling and how we should treat them.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Make any craft using gold to highlight the “golden rule.”
- Print a copy of the Golden Rule memory verse page and then have the children decorate borders with gold paint and gold glitter.



Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

top

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and worksheets about the Beatitudes (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page and worksheets about loving your enemy (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page and worksheets about Jesus teaching the Apostles to pray-Lord's Prayer (Calvary Curriculum)
- Lesson Plan (Sunday school resources)
- Video: "Understanding the Sermon on the Mount" by Messages of Christ. Youtube video is just over 10 minutes in length. Good overview of the sermon.

top

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