



Dig Deeper Devotional

What Real Believers Look Like: When Following Jesus Becomes Visible

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

I confess that it is easier to call myself a follower of Jesus than to live faithfully beneath everything Jesus commands. Search me today, Lord and help me with my pride, resentment, retaliation towards others and selfishness. Remind me how Christ loved me. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit to guide me to that which obedience requires yet human strength cannot sustain, so that my life might bring glory to the Father and blessing to those around me.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Scripture Foundation

NIV — Matthew 5:14–16

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden... In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

KJV — Matthew 5:14–16

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Teaching & Insight

Jesus consistently presses belief into the ordinary places where character is exposed: relationships, conflicts, possessions, reactions, private motives, public conduct, even our treatment of people who oppose us. That is part of what makes the Sermon on the Mount so unsettling. Matthew 5–7 does not permit Christianity to remain theoretical.

Jesus speaks about anger, lust, marriage, integrity, revenge, generosity, enemies, prayer, money, worry, judgment, discernment, obedience, and eternal destiny. He reaches into nearly every compartment human beings prefer to keep separated from religion, then declares His authority over all of it. The Sermon on the Mount therefore

does more than describe admirable ethics. It reveals what life beneath the reign of Christ begins to look like.

Salt and Light: Faith That Benefits Someone Else

Jesus tells His followers:

“You are the salt of the earth.”

Then:

“You are the light of the world.”

Salt affects what it touches. Light alters the environment into which it enters. Neither fulfills its purpose by existing solely for itself. Likewise, genuine discipleship possesses an outward dimension. Jesus identifies the ultimate purpose in Matthew 5:16: others should see the believer’s good works and glorify the Father. Christian goodness is not spiritual advertising designed to make us appear impressive. If people encounter our lives and leave merely thinking, *What a wonderful person*, something remains incomplete. Until attention reaches the Father from whom every good thing originates, it is incomplete. The mature Christian asks:

“How can Christ become noticeable through me?”

Reconciliation: When Worship Meets Relationships

Jesus describes someone bringing a gift to the altar who remembers that another person has something against him. Remarkably, Jesus tells the worshiper to leave the gift and pursue reconciliation. Consider the weight of that instruction. The outwardly religious act is interrupted by an unresolved relational obligation. We sometimes imagine that our relationship with God exists independently from our relationships with people. Jesus repeatedly refuses that separation. Scripture certainly does not teach that every broken relationship can be completely restored; reconciliation requires truth, repentance, wisdom, and often the willingness of both parties. Neither does Christianity require remaining in abusive or dangerous circumstances. Yet Jesus leaves little room for believers who cherish resentment while presenting themselves as spiritually mature.

Romans 12:18 provides an important balance:

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

You cannot control another person’s response. You can surrender your own.

Restraint: Strength That Refuses Revenge

Jesus approaches one of humanity’s oldest instincts: Retaliation.

Someone hurts us, so something within us immediately begins calculating an appropriate response.

Modern retaliation does not always involve fists. It may arrive through sarcasm, gossip, silence, social media, reputation, passive aggression, or the carefully chosen sentence designed to wound precisely where we know someone is vulnerable. Jesus informs us to turn the other cheek. This does not mean Christians are to enable or justify injury at the hands of others. Jesus is confronting personal vengeance—the insistence that every injury must be answered with another injury. It requires restraint. To possess the strength to retaliate, yet surrender that strength to Christ, reveals something the world cannot easily explain. It resembles Jesus.

Generosity: Open Hands in a Closed-Fist World

Jesus continues:

“Give to the one who asks you...”

Christian generosity immediately challenges our instinct toward possession. We naturally ask, *How much must I keep?* Jesus repeatedly redirects the question toward stewardship: *What has God placed in my hands that could bless someone else?*

Generosity extends beyond money. Some believers can offer financial assistance; others possess time, experience, transportation, hospitality, encouragement, professional knowledge, practical skills, a spare bedroom, a listening ear, or simply the willingness to notice someone everyone else has overlooked. Generosity begins when we stop viewing everything we possess as existing for ourselves. Wisdom and boundaries still matter as does stewardship. Helping someone does not always mean giving precisely what is requested. Nevertheless, if our theology of stewardship always concludes with keeping more for ourselves, perhaps stewardship has quietly become an elegant name for selfishness.

Love Your Enemies: The Command That Exposes Us

Jesus says something so familiar that we risk forgetting how radical it actually sounds:

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Love your enemies. Pray for them. It is relatively easy to love people who affirm us. Reciprocal affection requires little supernatural explanation. Jesus points toward a kind of love whose source cannot be explained by ordinary human exchange. Refuse to let another person's hatred determine the condition of your heart. This does not mean calling evil good. Jesus never requires moral confusion. Nor does forgiveness erase every consequence or automatically restore trust. Enemy-love means that another person's sin does not receive permission to reproduce itself inside us. We belong to Christ. Therefore, even our enemies do not possess the authority to decide who we

become. Jesus is telling you that you will do what seems impossible - and with Him, all things are possible.

“Be Perfect”: An Impossible Command?

Matthew 5:48:

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

At first reading, the command appears crushing. Who among us could possibly satisfy such a standard?

The Greek word translated “perfect,” **τέλειος (*teleios*)**, carries the sense of completeness, maturity, wholeness, or reaching the intended goal. Within the immediate context, Jesus has been describing the Father’s indiscriminate benevolence: God causes the sun to rise upon evil and good alike and sends rain upon righteous and unrighteous people. Jesus is calling His followers toward a mature love that increasingly resembles the Father’s character. The standard remains impossibly high if attempted through unaided human effort. We need transformation.

Jesus does not simply give His people instructions and leave them to struggle alone. In John 14, after speaking about love expressed through obedience, He promises another Advocate—the Holy Spirit. Here we discover essential Christian transformation. To achieve fruit of the spirit, as Paul writes. This does not eliminate human responsibility. We must obey with all of our heart, soul and strength. Impossible? The Holy Spirit specializes in accomplishing what human nature declares impossible. This is why radical obedience should ultimately direct attention toward God.

So, What Does a Real Believer Look Like?

Salvation rests upon grace through faith in Christ, not upon achieving a sufficiently impressive behavioral score. Still, Jesus clearly teaches that faith bears fruit. A believer increasingly shaped by Christ becomes salt in places losing their flavor and light in places accustomed to darkness. Such a person takes relationships seriously, pursues peace where possible, practices restraint when revenge seems justified, gives with open hands, loves beyond reciprocity, and steadily grows toward the mature character of the Father.

DEED / ACTION

This week, conduct a Sermon on the Mount Reality Check.

Step 1: Examine Your Influence

Ask: Where am I currently functioning as salt and light?

Identify one place—home, workplace, church, neighborhood, friendship, or online presence—where Christ should become more visible through your conduct.

Step 2: Examine One Relationship

Is there someone with whom you should pursue peace? You cannot force reconciliation, yet you can determine whether pride is preventing you from taking a faithful first step.

Step 3: Identify Your Retaliation Pattern

When hurt, what is your instinct?

Ask the Holy Spirit to replace reaction with proper restraint and heart filled response.

Step 4: Practice Unexpected Generosity

Give something this week without expecting repayment, recognition, or advantage.

Step 5: Pray for One Person That Wrong You

Choose someone you find genuinely difficult to love. There may have been someone who wronged you. Pray for that person by name, recognizing that they too are broken and need grace. Do not begin by asking God to change them. The real ask is for God to change you.

Pause & Reflect

- If someone studied my behavior rather than my words, what would they conclude about the Jesus I follow?
- Does my faith noticeably benefit the people around me?
- Is unresolved pride interfering with a relationship God is asking me to address?
- How do I normally respond when I believe I have been treated unfairly?
- Is my generosity governed primarily by compassion or convenience?
- Can I sincerely pray for someone who has hurt me?
- Which command of Jesus currently feels beyond my natural ability?
- Have I been attempting Christian obedience through willpower rather than dependence upon the Holy Spirit?

Consider this final question carefully:

What might become possible if I asked “Holy Spirit, what do You want to accomplish through me?”

Hebrew Insight

אור (’*Or*) — “Light, illumination”

The Old Testament frequently uses light as an image of God’s presence, salvation, truth, and righteous direction. Isaiah 60:1 declares, “Arise, shine, for your light has come.” Light is never valuable merely because it exists. Its purpose is revelation.

When Jesus calls His followers the light of the world, Christian character becomes a visible testimony directing attention beyond the believer toward God.

Greek Insight

τέλειος (*Teleios*) — “Complete, mature, fully developed, brought to its intended goal”

In Matthew 5:48, Jesus commands His followers to be *teleioi* as their heavenly Father is *teleios*. Within the context of loving enemies, the word points beyond simplistic notions of flawless human performance toward the mature, undivided love that reflects the Father’s character.

The Holy Spirit progressively forms that maturity as we surrender ourselves to Christ.

Closing Prayer

Father,

Your standard exposes how far my natural instincts remain from the character of Jesus. Thank You for not leaving me alone with that calling. Holy Spirit, accomplish within me what I cannot accomplish through determination alone. Make me salt where goodness is disappearing and light where darkness seems comfortable. Let my conduct never become a performance intended to glorify me. May whatever good others encounter through my life direct their attention toward my Father in heaven.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Final Charge

The Sermon on the Mount was given to be lived.

Be salt. Be light. Pursue peace. Restrain retaliation. Give generously. Love radically. Depend completely upon the Holy Spirit—and let the world see what Jesus can do with a life surrendered to Him.

Sources

- The Holy Bible
- Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible
- Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon
- Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament
- Mondays With Mark Video Series — LifeMark Ministries