



“This is the Story...”

Written by Talashia Keim Yoder and Daniel Yoder. Artwork by Christa and Jonathan Reuel.  
Song lyrics and music by Jonathan Reuel.

## **Week 37: Life Inside the Blessing**

Matthew 5-7

**Intro Video:** <https://youtu.be/-W5C1oaoYP8>

**Review the big story:** God created the cosmos and humans and called it all good. We were created to live in harmony, but sometimes we miss the mark. All of humanity missed the mark, and they had to live with the consequences, but God stuck with them and continued to love them. Then God called a family to be a blessing to the whole earth. Like the humans before them, the generations of this family often missed the mark, but God was faithful.

When the people became slaves in Egypt, God raised up Moses to be their leader. God delivered them from slavery. In the wilderness, they learned to be a people of God, trusting in God’s provision, living out God’s commandments, and wrestling with the law in shalom community. As they prepared to go into the promised land, they were given the shema, words of love to keep with their whole beings. God brought the people into the promised land. There they continued to miss the mark, and God sent judges to guide them.

God raised up prophets, but the people demanded a king. Kings continued to miss the mark, and the kingdom divided into the north and south. God stuck with the people through leaders and prophets, and continued to call the people back to God, even as first the northern, and then the southern kingdom fell to invading powers. Some of the people were sent into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the kingdom. Through prophets and everyday people, God continued to stick with the scattered people and to reveal that God is so much bigger than they imagined. The people were finally able to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple.

As we begin the story of the New Testament, Rome is the power in charge and the people of God are waiting for a Messiah. This Messiah is announced, first with a surprising genealogy, then through an angel to Mary. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, and there, Jesus was born, proclaimed by angels, visited by shepherds, blessed by Simeon and Anna, and sought by magi. When Jesus’s life was in danger, his parents fled with him to Egypt, where they remained as refugees until it was safe for them to return and settle in Nazareth. As a child in Nazareth, Jesus grew up in the wisdom of God. His cousin John went before him, preparing the way, and when Jesus was ready to begin his ministry, he came to John to be baptized and was proclaimed by God. Jesus called a community of people to follow him.

**Key verse:** Matthew 5:14; 5:43-45; 7:12

**Tell the story:** Jesus went up on a mountain and began to teach. In what we often call the “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus described the fulfillment of God’s way of love. He told the people how God wanted them to live their lives, sometimes in ways that were very different from the world around them.

- Read Matthew 5-7 (the whole “sermon”). Or excerpts: Matthew 5:1-19; 5:38-48; 6:9-14; 6:19-21; 7:12; 7:15-20; 7:24-29.
- Read page 194-203 in the *Shine On* story Bible.

## Prime the pump:

- **Things to notice:**
  - Jesus goes up on a mountain to give wisdom. Who else do you remember going up on the mountain?
  - As you read this, what sounds familiar? Does what Jesus says in his sermon match up with what you've learned about God's way earlier in the story?
  - Jesus quotes and references so much scripture in these two chapters! We won't list all of them here, but if you have a study Bible, start digging in.
  - Jesus calls us the "light of the world." You may have heard Jesus called the light of the world, too. He's called that in Philippians 2:15 and John 8:12.
  - Notice Jesus' instructions in 5:39-40. Think ahead to what will eventually happen to Jesus. Does he live what he preaches?
  - 6:9-13 may be familiar to you! But wait - isn't there a part missing at the end? The last few words of the Lord's prayer, the doxology, weren't added until the time of King Henry VIII.
  - Is 7:12 familiar to you? We often call it the "golden rule." It's a way of interpreting the law and the prophets.
- **Background information:**
  - The phrase "blessed are..." is common in Jewish writings. Sometimes it's translated as "happy are..." Remember back to our story of God calling a family as you think about what blessing means here!
  - "Meek" (5:5) in Hebrew thought refers to people who "don't take advantage of their position." (Levine, Amy-Jill and Marc Zvi Brettler, Eds, 2017. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament, 2nd Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, pg 19.)
  - The word for "merciful" (5:7) is the Greek version *hesed* - that word from the Ruth and Naomi story! Steadfast love, one of the two primary aspects of God (the other is "justice").
  - In verse 29, Jesus refers to "hell." The Greek here is *Gehenna*, an actual, physical place, a "valley south of Jerusalem associated with child sacrifice." By Jesus' time, *Gehenna* was often used figuratively to describe torture after death for the wicked. (Levine, Amy-Jill and Marc Zvi Brettler, Eds, 2017. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament, 2nd Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, pg 21.)
  - "Go the second mile" (5:42) - Roman soldiers would often conscript people to carry their gear for one mile, so this had very real connotations.
  - *Teleios*, the Greek word we interpret as "perfect," implies wisdom and maturity more than our definition of perfection.
- **Conversation starters:**
  - Matthew puts the beatitudes and the sayings of Jesus into one long sermon. Luke spreads it out a little more and focuses more on the here and now. The parallel texts are mostly in Luke 6, but keep popping up through Luke 14. Take a look at the parallels - how are they different and how are they similar? Why do you think the writers did things differently?
  - Christians are often tempted to say that Jesus contradicts the Old Testament. But we can see here that this sermon is one long interpretation of what's already there in scripture. Why do you think we've dismissed the Old Testament so often in our history? Play that out - how has this disregard impacted the world?
  - The word interpreted as "wealth" in 6:24 is the Greek *mamonas*, sometimes said in English as "mammon." It means so much more than wealth - it means placing trust in something other than God. In a sense, this idea of where our trust is pervades this whole sermon. What does it mean in life to place our trust in God?

**Microsong:** "Life Inside the Blessing" (Listen: <https://youtu.be/4exrjUZ5jSc>)

Jesus teaches the disciples, "This is the life inside the blessing: You're blessed, you who are empty. You're blessed all you who mourn. You're blessed, you who ache for God, whose inner life is pure. This is life inside the blessing."

**Sing the big song:** (Listen: <https://youtu.be/txDXoemiDaE>)

This is the story of how it all began. God made matter, and chaos shattered.

Eve and Adam, they tried to hide. The world got violent and God replied with a mark and a flood and a rainbow sign, God's love written on skin and sky,

*And then God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, oh ohhhh*

A mother and her favorite son wrestle for the blessing, another son becomes a slave, the land is saved from famine.

God's family grows. Egypt oppresses. They groan to God and God sends Moses.

*Ten strange signs say "Please release them!" By the sea God saves them.* Oh ohhh.

The people complain and God rains bread. Daily food and ten new rules.

Five sisters come and ask for land. God says "Yes, amend the law!"

*Moses says, "In your new life across the Jordan, love God with your whole heart and with all your being, and your strength, now listen: God is One, only God! God is One, only God!"*

Cross over Jordan, stories and stones. Circuits and shouts and the walls come down.

God sends judges like Deborah and the land has rest.

Ruth's worth more than seven sons; Redeem the lost with steadfast love.

Corruption in the temple then God sends Samuel.

God gives them a prophet, they ask for a king. Does God need a temple? A wise king forgets. And when a bully rules the land, the nation tears apart and loses David's heart...

A widow's gift and a prophet's cry. God brings life in desperate times.

Josiah reads this misplaced scroll. He turns to God wholeheartedly like David did. In his time.

God gives Jeremiah a picture of God's ruined family...

Is there any hope left, is there any hope left, is there any hope left for you, Jerusalem?

Any hope? Any hope left? Is there any hope left for you?

By the streams of Babylon, how can we sing when you are gone, Jerusalem...

I'm in a valley of human bones. These bones are Israel, God's breath is hope.

Haman plans death for Esther's exiles. She risks her life so they might survive.

Finally God's family rebuilds the temple in Jerusalem. God plunges them into a sea of joy and celebration of Only God. God is One, Only God.

Comfort to Jerusalem, your warfare finally ceases.

Matthew lists these generations, Abraham to Jesus

The angel says, "You'll have a son and God will give him David's throne." Mary says, "God looked at me, now I'm the luckiest person around.

Mary, now pregnant fiancé, makes a grueling journey.

She has her baby, shepherds see angels declaring God's glory and peace among people.

The Spirit sends shepherds and elders and prophets to tell those who wait their Messiah has come.

Herod gets nervous, the Magi find Jesus. They hide their discovery and hurry back home...

Once again an angel comes to Joseph -- so they make good their escape, oooh.

Jesus in the temple, astonishing the crowd. Jesus with his parents. Jesus growing up.

Down by the Jordan with the prophet John, Jesus asks to be baptized. And the skies are opened. A dove descends. A voice from heaven says, "This is my son, the son I love. I'm pleased with him."

Jesus calls disciples to be with him in the work he's doing. Ohhh ooohh.

Jesus teaches the disciples "This is life inside the blessing: You're blessed, you who are empty. You're blessed all you who mourn. You're blessed, you who ache for God, whose inner life is pure. This is life inside the blessing."

*God loves every one of us, it's true. And God loves the universe.*

**Go do your household project!**