

Savoring God's Word

A Meditation on Matthew 5:38-42; Mark 9:35-37

by Jan Johnson
www.janjohnson.org

HAVING THE HEART OF CHRIST **Surrendering My Drivenness**

This meditation exercise about how God calls us to be different from others is especially for those wishing to have the heart of Christ. If you wish to have a group meditate on the passage together, the instructions for the group leader are in italics. If you wish to use it alone, ignore those instructions. This meditation roughly follows the pattern of *lectio divina*, but also includes elements from the Ignatian style of Scripture meditation. For more information about how to meditate on Scripture, see *Savoring God's Word* or CD *Meditating on Scripture* (scroll to the bottom).

WARMING UP (5-10 minutes)

Center yourself by breathing in and out several times. Relax your neck and then take time to let your muscles relax. Turn over each distraction as you ask yourself the following question: **In what ways might someone consider you a "loser"?** Close your eyes and take a few minutes to quietly consider past experiences and relationships. Nothing may come to you until later, but let the process begin now.

Group leader: After group members have had a chance to greet each other, read the centering instructions above. Then present the above "quiet question" and let them reflect quietly for a few minutes. Repeat the question and ask them to share their thoughts in a sentence or two. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so.

READING the PASSAGE (15-20 minutes)

Read silently the passages printed below, noting the explanations in the right column.

Group leader: Ask a group member to read the passage below aloud. Suggest that other group members might want to close their eyes and listen.

MATTHEW 5:38-42

THE HEART WILLING TO GO the EXTRA MILE

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, *Do not resist an evil person.* If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if

ITALICIZED WORDS & PHRASES

'EYE FOR EYE, AND TOOTH FOR TOOTH.'

This command was originally given to limit retaliation (Exod. 21:23-25) because at that time a person's life might be taken for injuring another's sight. This law had nothing to do with personal revenge.

someone wants to sue you and take your *tunic*, let him have your *cloak* as well. 41 If someone *forces you to go one mile*, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

MARK 9:35-37

THE HEART WILLING TO BE LAST

35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." 36 He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one of *these little children* in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

DO NOT RESIST AN EVIL PERSON Christians do resist the devil (James 4:7) and societal forces of evil (Eph. 6:13), but they don't take personal revenge.¹

TUNIC . . . CLOAK A tunic was the inner garment worn close to the skin, which could be held in pledge. A cloak (the outer garment usually worn with a belt or girdle) could not be held in pledge. It had to be returned, even to a poor person.

FORCES YOU TO GO . . . Roman soldiers could force others to carry equipment for a mile.

THESE LITTLE CHILDREN Although our society is child-centered, children were second-class citizens in biblical times. Jesus spent a great deal of time welcoming insignificant people -- including children.

If you haven't read the notes in the right column, read them silently now. Take a minute to consider the following questions.

Group leader: After the passage is read, ask group members to read silently the explanations in the right column and then to jot down answers to the questions below. After a few minutes, have them choose one question and share their answer to that question in a sentence or two. Or they may pass, if they wish. Explain that this is not a time for discussion, but for reporting responses to the questions.

SURRENDER

1. It's a monumental struggle to give up vying for what we want or what will advance our cause. We fear what will happen if we surrender our will. Here are some fears we have about surrendering so much of our will. Mark the ones that you sense within yourself.

- that God, who "supplies all my needs," won't prevent me from being exploited
- that God won't meet my needs during the second mile
- that life will be desolate during the second mile
- I will lose too many material things in the process
- other: _____
- other: _____

2. When we're asked to "give to him who asks you," we respond in several different ways:

- give with a full heart
- give grudgingly
- try to pretend we didn't hear

¹*The Quest Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 1339.

- rationalize why we can't be expected to consider the request
- refuse to consider it as a possibility

If we view this phrase as a command to give anything away that's asked of us, we have to whip our attitudes and actions into shape immediately. If we view it as God telling us what kind of heart to have, we sense His invitation to go to Him and present our unwilling heart for repair. Who do you know who has a willing, surrendered heart?

3. Consider this paraphrase of Mark 9:35 ("If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all"): *If anyone wants to be a winner, he must become a loser.* Some people aren't bitter losers because they have a realistic sense of who they are. In what ways does knowing Christ give you a realistic sense of who you are?

- I can recognize and admit my mistakes better.
- I can feel accepted in spite of my mistakes.
- I feel hopeful about how God works in me.
- I can trust God to make up for the things I cannot do.
- I can trust God to lead me to do the things I need to do.
- other: _____

4. Consider this paraphrase of Acts 20:35 ("It is more blessed to give than to receive"): "According to Jesus, it is more important to give justice and mercy than to receive it."² When we're wronged by another driver or a corporation or a co-worker, it's difficult to show justice and mercy rather than demand it from them. Have you ever offered justice and mercy instead of demanding it? Did you have good feelings about it? If so, what was involved in those good feelings?

- relief at not having to win
- freedom from having to be in control
- admiration of Christ for his ability to do this at all
- elation at not having to be right
- peace with not having to have the last word
- other: _____
- other: _____

5. These passages speak about vulnerability as did the last one. They require that larger view of life and our place in God's world. We have to see ourselves in God's hands: "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God." (John 13:3)

If you wish, draw a simple doodle that represents this belief of you being in God's hands. (Serious cartooning or artwork will take too much time.) Or, draw a symbol of absolute dependence on God -- using shapes or lines, such as this Chinese symbol for faith:



²*Life Application Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1991), p. 1656.

PICTURING the PASSAGE (10-15 minutes)

Read the passage again -- aloud, this time -- and close your eyes, putting yourself in one or all of these places:

- walking unarmed into a violent situation to make peace
- standing at the roadside, offering to carry a Roman soldier's equipment another mile
- offering help to someone who has treated you badly

If these images make you uncomfortable, try imagining yourself in God's hands as you do these things.

Group leader: Have group members read the suggestions silently. Then ask them to put themselves in one of the situations as another group member reads the passage aloud again.

SOAKING in the PASSAGE (5-15 minutes)

Consider how your life is touched by this passage. Read the passage aloud again and ponder the following question for several minutes: **Is there within this passage a word or phrase that stays with you?** If you begin to latch on to something that is most evident, step back a minute and wait to see if anything else emerges.

After several minutes, write below a word or phrase that resonates with you from the passage.

Group leader: Ask a different group member to read the passage aloud and then state the question printed in bold. Have the group sit quietly and fill in the blank when they're ready. After a few minutes, ask group members to read what they've written. Remind them that they may pass if they wish.

PONDERING the INVITATION (5-15 minutes)

Perhaps God is offering you an invitation in this passage to do or be something in the next few days. What might that be? Sit in silence for a few minutes, pondering this question: **What do I sense this passage is calling me to do or be right now?** Be open to the quiet, but don't feel pressured to come up with something.

Group leader: Read the above instructions aloud and after a few minutes, repeat the question printed in bold. Ask group members to respond by saying, I SENSE THIS PASSAGE CALLING ME TO: and then completing that statement with a short phrase. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so.

PRAYING (5-10 minutes)

Take a few minutes to respond to God about this passage. **How do you feel about what you sensed (or didn't sense)? What is it you most want to say to God at this time?**

Group leader: After allowing a few minutes for private prayer, ask group members to pray for the person on their left. Anyone wishing to pray silently may do so, saying, "I'm praying silently." When they're finished, they can say, "Amen."

DAILY LECTIO:

If you wish, use the above format to meditate on God's word between group meetings. You may wish to focus on today's passage everyday this week or use the following passages:

- Psalm 18:25-32 (how God rescues the humble)
- Matthew 11:28-30 (God's yoke is easy and burden is light)
- Ephesians 4:1-7 (what it takes to be gentle and patient, bearing with one another in love)
- James 4:7-10 (how submission to God is required to be humble with others)
- 1 Peter 3:8-16 (living together in harmony and peace)
- 1 Peter 5:6-10 (elements of humility)

###