

# Are you listening? Are you following?

## INTRODUCTION TO TODAY'S THEME

Something about **instructions**, trying to understand them and follow them (IKEA, other assemble-yourself products).

What sorts of tools will you need?

And is it OK to just ignore the instructions and just go ahead as seems right?

The outcome? Something that works according the maker's intent or becomes something that doesn't work at all or that breaks or is less than intended ...

Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount offers us God's instructions for life...

Read: [Deuteronomy 11:18-21](#) [Psalm 31:1-5, 19-24](#) [Matthew 7:1-29](#)

## Blueprints

The blueprint process for printing technical drawings and plans was invented way back in 1842 by an English science whiz, inventor and experimental photographer called John Herschel. These drawings printed white lines and white instructions on a deep blue background. I remember getting out musty smelling blueprints back in my days as an engineer. They showed the original design and all the measurements needed to build a piece of equipment, a road or a bridge ... These days, of course, everything is digital and a plan may never actually be printed on a sheet of paper ... just viewed on a smart phone or laptop.

A blueprint – or a plan more generally – is only useful of course if you put the plan into action and build something. So there have been many plans developed, for instance, for a high speed rail link along the east coast of Australia but nothing has ever eventuated.

The Sermon on the Mount – that has been our focus for the last several weeks – is **Jesus' blueprint for life in the kingdom of God**. It's a plan or a set of instructions for how to live a life that is pleasing to God and also a life that is compassionate and generous towards our neighbours. It's a simple plan that involves just three steps –

listening, trusting and following. In the Greek language of the NT, the first and last steps are closely related. The word for listen is *akouw*, while the word for following or obeying is *hupakouw*.

*listening – akouw (in Greek)*  
*trusting*  
*following hupakouw (in Greek)*

As Jesus points out several times towards the end of his message, we haven't really heard his teaching unless we follow it and put it into practice.

### A brief recap

As this is our last week looking at the Sermon on the Mount I thought it would be helpful to do a brief recap on the message so far. You can [download a copy from the website](#).

The **setting** for the sermon is Jesus' ministry of announcing the good news of the kingdom and healing people from various diseases and afflictions (Matt 4:23–25). These people – poor and wealthy, women and men, Jews and non-Jews – are among those who are being **blessed** by God through Jesus' ministry (Matt 5:1–12). In response, Jesus calls these people – and the rest of his growing flock of followers – to be a **light** to those around them and to be like **salt** in their community (Matt 5:13–16). To his opponents, Jesus appears to often flout the Jewish Law, but Jesus insists that he is **fulfilling the Law and the Prophets** through his ministry of teaching and healing (Matt 5:17–20).

Jesus goes on to illustrate how his teaching fulfils the Law. He offers six examples or illustrations of what he means (Matt 5:21–48). A narrow and fairly rigid interpretation of the Law forbids murder and adultery, for instance, but allows anger and sexual domination by men to flourish. The result? Today we still have a major issue with domestic violence. Instead, Jesus argues that his inspired interpretation of the Law focuses on reconciliation between people, overcoming injustice and living a right life that reflects the character of God.

What matters is the **heart attitude** that overflows into **action**. The final illustrations show the contrast between revenge and hatred on the one hand, and generosity and love on the other. It's a message that the world still desperately needs to hear and live

out.

More briefly, Jesus then suggests there are two key **barriers** that may prevent us from following his blueprint for life. One is our religious **reputation** – what others think about us (Matt 6:1–18). The second is **reliance on money** for our security (Matt 6:19–34). The solution? Don't seek to impress others and trust God to provide what you need each day.

In this week's section, a key verses is the so-called **golden rule** to treat neighbours as you would have them treat you, rather than judging or demanding things from them (Matt 7:1–12). The final part of the message is a renewed call to follow the teaching and example of Jesus, which has its rewards, and to heed warnings of the danger of not following, not acting on Jesus' words (Matt 7:13–27). The response of the crowds listening in to this message is **astonishment!** Jesus has an authority and authenticity in his teaching that is completely different to his peers (Matt 7:28–29).

### The golden rule

I want to say a few things about the golden rule that, astonishingly, never appears as a text on the weekly lectionary of readings ... which is one reason we've extended our series on the Sermon on the Mount.

Most teaching on morality is couched in negatives ... don't murder, don't steal, don't lie, and so forth ... as in the Ten Commandments. But here Jesus summarises that moral law in a simple, positive and memorable way:

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*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

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This verse not only summarises the Law and the Prophets but is also a good summary of the whole Sermon on the Mount, completing a full circle back to the beginning of the teaching where Jesus challenges his hearers to do and to teach all that he says in order to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. It's similar to the call to love your neighbour as yourself, but avoids the ambiguity about the word 'love'.

So as we look back over the whole message, what might this look like?

- seek reconciliation with those you disagree with
- seek justice for all especially those lacking power such as women

- be generous with your time and talents
- trust God for what you need
- forgive and be compassionate, just as God forgives you
- follow God's example – and Jesus' example – of self-giving love

Note that it's not a neat **formula**. Rather it's about attitudes and priorities of what's important in life. It needs to be thought about and worked out in every new situation. Living like this will be costly, difficult and may damage our status or reputation. It may put a dent in our private wealth. It's certainly more than just mouthing the right words. Not all who call Jesus 'Lord' will enter God's kingdom but rather those who **do** the will of God.

It's why I have a real problem with many of our politicians, especially those who claim to be Christians. **How can one hold to this core teaching of Jesus and then lock up asylum seekers for years and years?** Is this how any of us would wish to be treated? Or why such a focus on achieving a budget surplus and yet ignore the fact that most of the homeless and those living on Newstart are living in poverty and struggling to even put food on the table? Is this how we would wish to be treated in the same situation?

It's why ministries like **Helping Hand** and the **weekly community lunches** up at **Croydon North** are important. It's an opportunity for us as followers of Jesus to put our faith into action, to draw alongside others and treat them with dignity and grace. It's why we have a **Justice group** who call on our politicians to change their priorities. It's why we visit and provide practical help for the sick, the lonely and the grieving.

But as I draw this series to a close, there are aspects of Jesus' message that are highly important but only hinted at. The Sermon on the Mount sets a very high bar for followers of Jesus. It sets us a demanding and challenging blueprint for life. So many of us think it's way too hard to live out in practice. We sort of tune out and ignore the call to walk the narrow road, the road less travelled. We opt for mediocre discipleship and for respectability instead.

I suspect Jesus would look us in the eye – with great love – and ask us 'why?'

I also suspect that Jesus may gently draw our attention to two important truths.

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*The first is that following him is never a solo journey that we do on our own.*

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The very first thing Jesus did in his public ministry was to call people into a new **community**. He called Peter and Andrew, James and John to join him in this new community. It's still the same today. We need each other – to share our wisdom, our encouragement and our doubts – along the way. So it's vital that we find new and multiple ways to connect with each other and to grapple together with what it means to be a follower of Jesus in this time and place.

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*Second, as evidenced throughout Jesus' life, the only way to live in the way he describes is to rely on **God's love, God's grace and God's empowering.***

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It means taking the time to listen to what God's Spirit is saying to us and trusting in the presence of Jesus – **Emmanuel** – God with us – to guide and support us.

So I want to finish with a well-known passage from the book of Isaiah:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.

Even youths will faint and grow weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;

**but those who wait for the Lord  
shall renew their strength,**

**they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,**

**they shall walk and not faint.**

Amen.