

Fall 2025 Grow Groups: Week 4
“Better: Different”
Matthew 5:9-16

GOAL

Our faith should radically change how we relate to the world around us.

TO-DO LIST

- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests and new members (please include their contact information in the meeting notes section).
- If you meet on-campus, there are Connection Cards available for you in your room for guests to fill out and give to you. Please make sure to drop them in one of our offering boxes in the Worship Center before you leave church any given Sunday.
- Remind Grow Group members it's not too late to join Men's and Women's Bible Studies this fall at VRBC:
 - Women's Mondays 7-8:30pm (location change: now in Student Auditorium)
 - Men's Wednesdays 6-7:30pm
- Plan your Fall 2025 Grow Group Pair-Up and email details to Meghan at mhendrickson@vrbc.net

LOOK AHEAD

- The primary Scripture for next week's sermon is: Matthew 5:17-30
- This week's memory verse is: Matthew 5:16

DISCUSS

PART 1: PROCESS THE SERMON

>> Read Matthew 5:9-16.

- **As we focus on listening to Jesus, what is the primary message of truth you sensed God speaking to you in our worship gathering this week?**

>> Why do you think God cares so much about us being peacemakers?

- **How do we reflect Jesus when we seek to make peace in the world?**

Leader Notes:

- *When we remember that we exist to glorify God, it should not surprise us that God is glorified when we live at peace with ourselves and with the world around us. To live at peace with someone does not mean we endorse everything about that person, but it means to choose that person over and above whatever lesser issue or identity seeks to divide us.*
- *All of humanity is created in the image of God, and as we seek God and his righteousness, the Holy Spirit helps us see one another as fellow image-bearers created to know God, love God, and show God is love. The Holy Spirit is the only one who can help us remember our struggle is not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12), and it is not our place to seek revenge (Romans 12:19), but rather to fight for righteousness (2 Timothy 4:7-8).*
- *We reflect Jesus when we seek to make peace in the world because God reconciled the world to him through Christ, and God has given us the same ministry and message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). When we live as peacemakers, we truly are living as “children of God” (Matthew 5:9).*

>> Besides Jesus, who is someone you know personally who lives into their God-given identity as a peacemaker?

- **How have you seen that person bring the peace of Christ into a situation or relationship, and what can you learn from their example?**

Leader Notes:

- *Living as a peacemaker in today’s world can feel like a fairy tale beyond our reach. It is helpful to see that living as a peacemaker does not mean we single-handedly accomplish the world peace everyone is supposed to wish for in a pageant interview. Living as a peacemaker often starts sooner, closer, and smaller than we might anticipate. Considering how we have seen others live as peacemakers in our own time, may inspire us to live as peacemakers in our own lives, too.*

>> In what relationship(s) is God inviting you to serve as a peacemaker right now?

- **What could it look like for you to live into your God-given identity as a peacemaker this week?**

Leader Notes:

- *If we miss the call to live as salt and light in the form of peacemakers this week, we have missed the whole point. It is worth our time to lift the relationships in our lives to God and ask him to show us where he wants to bring peace, and how he wants to use us as peacemakers to help bring about that much-needed peace.*

>> Why might someone who lives as a peacemaker experience persecution?

- **In our society, do you think it is easier to make peace or cultivate chaos, and why?**

Leader Notes:

- *It is easy to complain and condemn others in the name of fighting for righteousness, but it is challenging to hold our tongue, to pray for others, and to not share every opinion we have that can easily tear down rather than encourage and build up.*
- *As we discussed last week, our nature is to desire vengeance more than mercy. A peacemaker is someone who recognizes the mercy God continues to show them and is generous in extending mercy toward others. Showing mercy is not the way of the world and is sure to bring about persecution to some degree. But we can “rejoice and be glad, for great is [our] reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before [us]” (Matthew 5:12).*

>> Read Romans 14:19 and Hebrews 12:14.

- **What do these two verses have in common?**
- **How does the phrase “without holiness no one will see the Lord,” in the context of Hebrews 12:14 remind you of the promise we studied last week in Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God?”**

Leader Notes:

- *Romans 14:19: “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”*
- *Hebrews 12:14: “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”*
- *Both passages urge us to “make every effort” to either live in peace or do what leads to peace (clearly, this way of life matters for followers of Jesus).*

- *Interestingly, living in peace with everyone sets us apart as holy (which is, by definition, different), and it also leads to a mutual building up (rather than the one-way destruction we see run rampant in the world around us).*
- *If God is holy, and someone has never seen something holy, how could that person see the Lord? Similarly, as someone seeks to live a life that is holy to God, it is likely they will have a clear vision of the Lord.*
 - *An example of this is from our VRBC Women's Bible Study on Monday night:*
 - *We took turns sharing about how God has carried us through our suffering. In those set apart seasons of our lives, we desired God more than ever, and we saw him more clearly.*
 - *Even in our testimonies this week, we communicated God clearly with one another. I said to a few people, "it is impossible for a woman to walk out of this room without knowing who God is." I was not simply saying it would be hard for someone to leave without a relationship with God, but that it would be hard for someone to leave without a clear view and understanding of God.*
 - *God has always been God. God has always been clear. God is not far from us, but he wants to be found. When we suffer, we tend to seek and find. When we get too comfortable, we tend to neglect and forget.*

>> Around how many times would you estimate you encounter someone who does not yet know Jesus each week?

- **What are some ways you could either increase the *number of times* you encounter not-yet believers each week, OR what are some ways you could increase the *amount of time* you spend in your encounters with not-yet-believers each week?**

Leader Notes:

- *While we all know salt is supposed to season and light is supposed to shine, it is easy for us to spend most of our lives surrounded by salt and light rather than spreading salt and light.*
- *We often think we need to go out of our way to be salt and light, but the Holy Spirit can open our eyes to see potential encounters with not-yet-believers that we may not recognize on our own as we so easily fall into the trap of the world's conveniences.*

- *While going to the Target Drive-Up is convenient, we may miss out on encounters with the cashier trying to pay his way through school, or the young adult in the spice aisle trying to figure out the difference between sea salt, kosher salt, Himalayan pink salt, and iodized salt.*
- *While ordering ahead from McAlister's may save time, we may miss out on getting to pray for our server who just moved to the area and is looking for community (and inviting her to join us for worship and Grow Groups!).*
- *While choosing to order supplies online and have them delivered to our mailbox is simple, we may miss out on the conversation God wants us to have with someone in line at the store who feels invisible and is overwhelmed with life, thinking the best way to get through life is simply to end it.*
- *While scrolling through social media and commenting on posts is a good way for us to keep up with what is happening in the lives of others, we may miss out on hopping on the phone or sitting across a dinner table from a friend who is terrified to post about their separation and does not think anyone will ever love them for who they are.*
 - *Grow Group Leader, these are all notes from my personal life experience about ways I can easily miss out on interacting with others in my day-to-day routines, but I encourage you to consider your own life experiences and feel free to share from that space with your own Grow Group. Maybe it is missed encounters in your neighborhood, at the gym, in your workplace, or at your child's school. We have far more opportunities to encounter others than we often think we do, and we certainly have opportunities to make the most of those encounters.*
- *What if some of the choices we make to save time end up stealing time? What if we forfeit opportunities to love our neighbors in the name of convenience?*

>> God has given us a message of peace in Jesus to share with the world. Jesus says in John 20:21, "Peace be with you! As the father has sent me, I am sending you."

- **Who is God sending you to share the good news of peace in Christ with?**
- **Where is God sending you to make a difference?**

Leader Notes:

- *While Pastor John asked this question in our worship service, it is important we recognize God is ultimately the one asking us this question each day from the day he saved us in Christ Jesus until the day he carries us home to be with him forever (Isaiah 6:8).*
- *VRBC has several ways to live sent this fall:*

- *Spend 30 minutes each week serving as a Walk With Me mentor in a local elementary school (sign up at vrbc.net/walkwithme)*
 - *Sign up to serve with our annual Christmas Store (including the Christmas Store registration events happening this week – see the VRBC events page to sign up)*
 - *Pray for our new Starting Point group in Cypress Waters (ask Arthur Mendes how else you can support this ministry)*
 - *Make the most of the opportunities to connect with others presented in your daily Listening Guides (join our Listening Community at vrbc.net/listen)*
- Remember that “greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world,” so you do not need to worry about manufacturing the light of Christ to shine bright in darkness (1 John 4:4). As you walk with Jesus and invite others to join you along the way, God will shine his light through you just by being you – rescued and redeemed by grace through faith – and being willing to step into dark spaces or difficult situations.

>> How is God inviting you to respond to what you have seen and heard from him in worship and our discussion today?

PART 2: LISTENING TO JESUS TESTIMONIES

>> We invite and encourage everyone to join us on our journey of Listening to Jesus this year. If you have not yet joined our Listening Community to receive our daily Listening Guides by email or on Instagram, please do so. And please grab your Listen Journal in the lobby that is our gift to you. Plan to bring your Listen Journal with you to our Grow Group each week as we hope it will be a space for you to keep track of all you are seeing and hearing from God along this journey.

>> For those of you who have joined us on the journey, what is something you heard from God this week that you would like to share with us?

- **What is something you saw God do this week that you can share with us?**
- **How has God challenged you on this Listening to Jesus journey this week?**
- **How has God blessed you on this Listening to Jesus journey this week?**

>> As we seek to keep in step with the Spirit this week, how can we pray with you?

PRAY

God, thank you for bringing peace to us, and both inviting and equipping us to bring peace to others. Personally and corporately, we need so much more of your peace, Lord. Teach us how to live into our true identity as peacemakers in a world that is trying to make us anything but. Let your light shine in us and through us, that others would see the peace you bring to us along with the peace we bring to others, and give glory to you alone – our merciful Father in heaven.