Facilitators: Read these recommended responses to the questions ahead of time to help you prepare to lead the small group discussion.

Participants: Reinforce what you have learned by reviewing these recommended responses after your group discussion and before you go on to the next lesson.

A. Review the Context

Discussion Leaders: Take a brief moment to review the context and what was learned last week. If you like, use the following question to encourage discussion:

- How do you approach God in prayer? What did you learn from Matthew 6 that can strengthen your relationship with the Father?

B. Read the Story

Discussion Leaders: If there is time, have someone read each passage before it is discussed.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Judging Others: Matthew 7:1-6

1. a. Jesus says to “Judge not, that you be not judged” (verse 1). What kind of judgment is he talking about, and why does he speak against it? See also James 4:11-12.

   Jesus is speaking against judging others for their faults, for we will be judged by the measure we use. If we judge others unmercifully, we will bring that same judgment upon ourselves. Jesus also speaks against condemning others when we are guilty ourselves. Ultimately this is about who we are in relationship to God, and what our place is and is not. As James says, “There is one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy.” When we pronounce judgment on others for their moral failures, we are playing a role that belongs to God.

b. How do Jesus’ instructions regarding judging relate to his words in 6:14-15? See also Catechism 678.

   Whether we receive God’s mercy is directly related to the way we show mercy to others. This is true whether it is manifest in a failure to forgive or a condemnation of others for their faults. In the final analysis, the way we treat others is the way we treat Christ. Therefore, our treatment of others shows whether we have accepted or refused his grace.

c. If we refrain from judging others, when will they be judged and by whom? Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-5.

   Judgment has been given to Jesus, to carry out when he returns. At that time, St. Paul says, he will “bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.”

d. Does Jesus mean we should never make any judgments? Read verses 6 and 15-19. What kinds of judgment are Christians to make?
While we cannot know the motives of people’s hearts and thus cannot pass judgment against them, we are to exercise critical discernment and judge between right and wrong so as to act prudently ourselves. It would be poor judgment to give holy things to those who will trample them, or to follow false prophets because we are afraid to make a judgment on whether they are from God.

We also can help others to see clearly when moral failure is clouding their vision, if we have examined and corrected our own failures first.

Prayer: Matthew 7:7-12

2. What promises does Jesus make in verses 7-12 about prayer?

Boldness and perseverance in prayer will pay off! Jesus tells us to ask, seek, and knock—and having done so, we will receive, find, and find the door opened. Why? Because God is our Father. Earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children and provide for their needs and even their wants—how much more so does God, who created us and loves us, give his children good things!

This doesn’t mean that God is like a cash machine and prayer a pre-paid bank card. If you ask for things that are not good for you, God—like any Father—may decide to say no. James speaks of the importance of asking “in faith, with no doubting” if we want to receive from the Lord (Jas 1:6-8). The more our will is aligned with his, the more his answer will be “yes.”

3. The “Golden Rule” (verse 12) is found in a negative form in rabbinic Judaism and other world religions: Don’t do things to others you don’t want them to do back. How does Jesus change it? How does this relate to true righteousness?

Jesus turns the prohibition inside out, directing it toward doing good for others as opposed to merely refraining from evil. This relates to true righteousness because it stems from a heart attitude focused away from self (and the tendency toward judging others that this brings) and toward others. As God’s children, we imitate him and his righteousness. “This is the law and the prophets,” Jesus says. It sums up the entire Gospel as does his commandment “that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

Entering the Kingdom – “the Two Ways”: Matthew 7:13-23

4. Jesus’ admonitions in the Sermon on the Mount may seem hard to fulfill. But what does Jesus say about the way to the kingdom in verses 13-14?

Jesus says the the way to the kingdom is narrow and difficult, and few find it. There is another “way” that is wide and pleasant, and that is the way that many people choose. If we are to enter eternal life in the kingdom of God, we must look for the narrow gate and make sure that we enter it regardless of the direction those around us are taking, regardless of the difficulty of the way.

5. Think about it: Is this a new message, or has Israel heard something like it before? Compare Jesus’ words here about the two gates with God’s message to Israel through Moses as they prepared to enter Canaan, in Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

There have always been two ways: “God’s way or the highway.” Moses set before the people life and good on one hand, death and evil on the other. Following and obeying the Creator of life leads to life, while going one’s own way and serving other gods leads to death. The paradox
remains today, which Jesus makes clear. The one way might appear appealing and easy but it is fraught with peril. The former might seem narrow and restrictive but it alone leads to life and blessing.

6. **Read verses 21-23.**
   a. *What are some of the signs people might wrongly rely on to convince themselves they will enter God’s kingdom? List some of your own observations as well.*

   Jesus warns of danger signs along the road, in particular people who may lead us off the path. These may call Jesus “Lord” and prophesy and do mighty works in God’s name, when in fact they are false prophets. How do you tell the difference? By their fruit. Don’t just listen to what they say, watch what they do—and see what comes of it.

   We must be aware of this tendency not only in others, but in ourselves as well. It is easy to convince oneself that if we are “doing all the right things,” we are OK. But are you doing the will of the Father? And are all those “right things” flowing from your heart? Are they bearing fruit in your life and the lives around you?

   b. **How can you be sure to follow the narrow way and enter the kingdom?**

   Following the narrow way entails obedience; doing the will of the Father. We must love God and imitate Christ. Nurture our relationship with God through prayer. Give from the heart. Show mercy and leave judgment to God. Be humble: All the things Jesus has been saying the Beatitudes.

**Hearers v/s Doers: Matthew 7:24-29**

7. **Jesus likens those who hear and obey his words to a wise man who built his house upon the rock. What is the moral sense of his teaching? (By “moral sense,” we mean the moral instruction this passage holds for us. See Catechism 117).**

   Just as Solomon, the ultimate wise man, built the Lord’s house on a great rock so it would endure, if we are wise we will build our spiritual houses on the rock of hearing and obedience to God’s word. To tie it in with Jesus’ other teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, the foolish man will build on his own strength and rely on the treasure he amasses on earth—yet these things can easily be swept away but the storms of life. His foundation is not strong and will not hold. The wise man who puts his trust in his heavenly father and follows him, praying as Christ has shown us and doing according to his word, however, will not be moved.

8. **How did the crowd respond to Jesus’ teaching?**

   The crowd was astonished at Jesus’ teaching because “he taught them as one who had authority.” In contrast, the scribes taught existing traditions. Jesus is a “new Moses,” giving them a “new law” that fulfills the old and surpasses it.

**D. Application**

**Discussion Leaders:** If time allows, have group members share their responses to the following application question:

*Reflect for a moment on your own life and family. What kind of a spiritual foundation have you laid, and how are you fortifying it? If you feel as though your house is “built on sand,” what can you do to build a stronger foundation? Do you have a plan?*
E. WRAP UP – Book 1: Announcement of the Kingdom

Discussion Leaders: If there is time, ask if anyone can summarize Book 1 of Matthew’s Gospel, which covers chapters 3 - 7. Opinions may differ; the point is not to find a “correct” answer but to lay out the major points of the two chapters, considered as a prologue to the Gospel that follows. You might ask questions like: What about Jesus’ background and early life did Matthew feel was important to convey in his narrative of Christ’s infancy and early years? How did these things prepare him for his mission? What was the gist of Jesus’ first recorded words to the people? Etc.

As a follow-up to this discussion, listen to or watch Jeff Cavins’ talk on Session 7: Matthew 7, "Choices in the Kingdom."