

## Six Good Books on the Sermon on the Mount

Offered with Best Wishes by Rev. Dr. Allen Hilton

**Anonymous** , *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* (14th Century)

“And St. Francis added: ‘My dear and beloved Brother, the treasure of blessed poverty is so very precious and divine that we are not worthy to possess it in our vile bodies. For poverty is that heavenly virtue by which all earthly and transitory things are trodden under foot, and by which every obstacle is removed from the soul so that it may freely enter into union with the eternal Lord God.’”

Perhaps no one in Christian history has taken the Sermon on the Mount more to heart and life than St. Francis of Assisi, who “married Lady Poverty, widowed since Christ”. His life mirrors the mid -section of the Sermon, embodying “consider the lilies of the field...and the birds of the air”, as well as Jesus’s ethic of non -retaliation. This book is a challenging and delightful collection of Francis’s words and acts that were compiled in the century after his death.

**Amy Jill Levine**, *Sermon on the Mount: A Beginner's Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven* (2020)

“If Jesus had preached this whole sermon at one time...the disciples' heads would have exploded!”

Perhaps you can relate to Dr. Levine’s assessment. You and I took eight weeks to hear the Sermon in parts, and it still blew us away! In her helpful book, AJL approaches Matthew 5 –7 as a collection of Jesus’s sayings that have been purposefully arranged as a sort of epitome of his teaching. Within SOM studies, this approach channels the thesis of Hans Dieter Betz in his *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount*. This is a good resource for small group Bible studies.

**Martin Lloyd -Jones**, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (1958)

“The terrible, tragic fallacy of the last hundred years has been to think that all man's troubles are due to his environment, and that to change the man you have nothing to do but change his environment. That is a tragic fallacy. It overlooks the fact that it was in Paradise that man fell.”

Dr. Lloyd-Jones held the pulpit of Westminster Chapel in London for three decades in the middle of the 20th century. Full disclosure, DMLJ is not my favorite character in modern church history. In 1966, he militantly called evangelicals to separate themselves from the Anglican church and other denominations. But his book on the

SOM is a classic that captures quite well Jesus's call to a Way that stands sturdy when storms come.

**Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (2017)**

"I am providing a reading of the Sermon that situates it in the dual context of Jewish wisdom literature and the Greco -Roman virtue tradition, both of which are concerned with the great theological and existential question of human flourishing.

Pennington, Jonathan T.. *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (p. 1). (Function). Kindle Edition.

This recent book approaches the Sermon from a theological perspective that should appeal to 21st-century American culture. Its mid -section (chs 6- 11) follows a standard commentary style, which may be more academic than some of you prefer. But the book as a whole supplies insights that I believe capture the heart of Jesus's teaching in SOM.

**John R.W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (1978)**

*"The followers of Jesus are to be different – different from both the nominal church and the secular world, different from both the religious and the irreligious. The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the New Testament of the Christian counter -culture."*

John Stott was a prominent thought leader in evangelical Christianity worldwide for four decades (before "evangelical" became a U.S. voting bloc). His book highlights the collision between the Way of Jesus and the ways that are offered in 20th and 21st century western cultures.

**Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949)**

"It cannot be denied that too often the weight of the Christian movement has been on the side of the strong and the powerful and against the weak and oppressed — this, despite the gospel."

While this extremely significant book was not written as a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Dr. Thurman's understanding of Jesus as a member of the oppressed Jewish people under Roman rule is clearly shaped by Matthew 5 –7. This interpretation of Jesus deeply impacted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and, in many ways, set the course for the Civil Rights Movement.