



# THE WAY Sermon Study Guide

## Week 5: The Way in the Midst of Evil

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At the end of another busy year, we're often eager to retreat into the warmth, wonder and nostalgia of the Christmas season. But the Gospel of Matthew reminds us that the full story of Christmas is much more than just a cosy stable scene. It's disruptive, confronting and deeply honest about the reality of evil in the world and in the human heart.

Into the middle of this reality, Christ enters and invites us to choose a different way. This week we reflect on what it means to live as people of wisdom and courage in the midst of a broken world.

### Read Matthew 2:1-18

Matthew's telling of the Christmas story doesn't shy away from the presence of evil in the world. It's the M15+ version, confronting us with violence, murder and deceit. And Herod is the main villain.

Known throughout history as a ruthless ruler consumed by scandal, paranoia and violence, Herod represents undeniable evil, but he also reveals something about evil's subtlety.

*"Let me know where he is so I can go and worship him too"* (verse 8). It's a harmless request. Reasonable. Non-threatening. Even friendly. And no one seems to see the evil intent lurking behind it.

Like malware slipping quietly onto a device, evil works beneath the surface long before anyone notices, and this same dynamic plays out today. We are very good at recognising evil at its endpoint—murder, corruption, abuse, and injustice. Yet, too



often we fail to recognise its starting point. Evil rarely begins with horrific actions. It begins with attitudes, justifications, excuses and small internal compromises that are much closer than we like to admit.

1. Where do you see subtle forms of evil at work in your own life—perhaps through attitudes, habits, or reactions you usually justify?
2. Community is a safeguard against deception and blind spots. Who in your life helps keep you accountable, grounded, and spiritually alert?

## Read 1 Peter 5:8

This imagery is vivid—a prowling lion, moving quietly, strategically. And Peter doesn't say, "Stay alert because you're good at spotting evil." Rather, he urges believers to be humble and awake to the fact that evil can outsmart us. It can justify itself. It can appear wise. It can disguise itself as a good idea or a necessary choice. This is why alertness and sober-mindedness matter so much. Without them, we are at risk of drifting into complacency and being devoured—like the religious leaders in Matthew's Christmas story.

In his fury, Herod orders the baby boys of Bethlehem to be killed, and the religious leaders stay silent. There is no protest. No argument. No action taken against this evil. Perhaps this is because standing up to Herod would put too much at risk—their religious freedom, their physical protection, their temple. And so, they look past the wrong, choosing instead to justify their inaction for the "greater good".

This is a human trait. It is in us too. Evil thrives when we allow it—when we look past practices and behaviours that take advantage of the weak, and turn a blind eye to the evil that's in our midst, and in our own hearts. But Jesus invites us to choose another path.

1. Challenging the evil of Herod's rule meant risking the benefits he provided (temple rebuilding, religious freedom and protection). When have you seen this happening in our world today, where "benefits" blind people to injustice?
2. Where do you sense God inviting you to live differently—to step away from patterns that mirror the world and step toward the way of Jesus?

## Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

In the Christmas story, the odds are stacked in favour of evil. A ruthless king with military power stands against a teenage couple and a baby. The situation looks hopeless. But God intervenes.



He speaks through dreams to the magi and to Joseph. He redirects their paths and disrupts Herod's schemes. He provides a way out.

God may not remove the evil we face, but He is faithful to show us another path. It may come as a quiet thought, a moment of clarity, a prompting, a word from Scripture, a lyric in worship, an unexpected insight or a conversation with another believer. The challenge is this: will we take the way out?

When the magi received the warning from God, they followed it. They didn't try to outsmart Herod with lies or manipulation. They didn't play the game of evil, even with good intentions. Instead, they took another path home.

The way to defeat evil is not to outplay it but to refuse to participate in its systems. Like the magi, we are invited to "take the other path home"—to choose ways of living that are radically different from the schemes of evil and deeply reflective of the heart of Christ. Sometimes this means putting distance between ourselves and something harmful. Sometimes it means confronting evil with courage but doing so with a completely different posture from the injustice we resist.

With wisdom, courage and faith, we live opposed to the schemes of evil in this world. This is the way of Jesus. And this is the path the Christmas story invites us to take.

1. Can you recall a time when you sensed God offering you a "way out" of a temptation or difficult situation? Did you take it? Why or why not?
2. What might it look like to "take another path home" in a situation you're currently facing? Does it involve distance, courage, forgiveness, or a different posture?
3. Think about the "still small voice" or the prompting that warns or redirects you. How do you discern whether a prompting is from God, instinct, or fear? What safeguards help clarify that prompting?

### Questions for further reflection & study (optional)

1. How does Luke's nativity (Luke 1-2) contrast to Matthew's version (Matthew 2)? How does each telling reveal different aspects of God's character and redemptive plan?
2. Where in the New Testament do we see Jesus modelling "taking another path" instead of following the ways of the world? (As a starting point, consider Matthew 5-7.)



## Suggested Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, give us eyes to see the early signs of evil and injustice; ears to hear your gentle warnings and prompts; and courage to choose your path. Help us care for the vulnerable, support one another in truth, and follow the way you show us. Amen.