



# **SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

**An Introduction to God's Round Pen**

Ted Noland



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## *Why do we have horses?*

For most people horses are a luxury. There are still a few real cowboys and cowgirls that use them on a daily basis for working cattle and riding fences, doing general ranch work, but no matter whether it's work or play, at some level we desire a relationship with our four-legged friends.



So the question becomes: what do we want out of that relationship? Better yet, what does God want out of His relationship with us?

*And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

*Genesis 1:25-26*



Dominion is not simply to rule over these beasts of burden, to make them do what we say, when and how we say it. The word *dominion* carries with it tremendous responsibility. The care and nurturing of these animals is paramount. If you can't properly care for a horse, you



shouldn't have one. The cheapest part of horse ownership is the purchase price. Dominion includes competent, regular farrier work, shots, feed, worming, floating of teeth and any other things that come up that require medical attention, regular exercise and turnout, stall cleaning, etc. etc. etc. I'll get off my soapbox, but I cannot over emphasize the importance of care.

*And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

*Genesis 1:27*

Imagine that! God created us in His own image. We are His masterpiece. God don't make no junk! When you get up in the morning, do you look in the mirror and see God's masterpiece? You should. God's horses are his masterpieces as well. I know that because He is coming back on a white horse, and those of us who are believers will be right behind him.



While they are His masterpieces, they don't come trained, and if you've had horses for any length of time, you've had a time or two when things didn't go so well. Maybe the horse wouldn't load, kicked the farrier, or maybe bucked you off. We've all been there, and it is frustrating to say the least.

Our horses seem to naturally do what frustrates us the most. Whenever they are doing something that is undesirable, they are running away from our instruction. Even if they are just standing but not giving to the slightest pull on the bit, they are running away.

If the horse has never been handled or been in the presence of humans before, that running thing becomes obvious real quick. Sometimes, though, our horses may have known us for quite some time and yet they are still running anyway, like when we go to the pasture to catch them and they see the halter in our hands. Dang if that ain't frustrating!

We run from God a lot, too. Even though we might be saved, we don't always do what he wants us to do. We flounder around in His permissive will rather than working in His perfect will. That doesn't mean we're out there robbing banks or pillaging and plundering our neighborhoods. It just means we're not doing precisely what He would have us to do.

"Well, how do I know exactly what it is that God wants me to do today?"

How about looking in His word? We can't possibly know what God wants us to do if we don't look to Him. Scripture is God's Holy, immutable word, His love letter to us. If we read it on a regular basis, take it to heart and implement what it says, we have the power to change our lives in ways that go beyond anything we can imagine. It starts with small changes as God convicts us of things we should do differently. Some of you



probably have more than one bible in your home. The question becomes how often do you read them? You might be thinking that you don't read it because you can't memorize the passages. Maybe you think the language is too hard to understand. Let me tell you a little story about that:

*There was a pastor who had a congregation member that said he wasn't going to read his bible anymore because he couldn't remember the things he had read. They were working in a farmer's market, co-op type of thing, and the pastor took a wicker basket and asked the man to go over to one of the spigots and fill the basket for ten minutes. The man looked at the pastor like he has lost his mind. He told the pastor that the basket wouldn't hold water and that it would be a waste of time. The pastor asked the man if he would just go and do it for him. Reluctantly the man went and held the basket under the tap for ten minutes.*

*When he came back the man said, "See, it didn't hold any water."*

*The pastor replied, "But you have to admit that it's a lot cleaner."*

People, we are living in very difficult times and we are all looking for answers. They are all right here in God's holy, immutable word. God can't teach us anything if we don't look to Him.



## ***Look at Me***

The same is true of our relationship with our horses; we can't teach our horses anything if they won't look at us. I have to have the horse's attention if I am going to teach him anything. If you get their attention, they will usually listen. Think about it this way, if the lead mare in the pasture decides she wants a gelding to move over she first must have his attention so that he knows she's asking him to move. She might start by just giving a look, pinning an ear. If that doesn't work, she may go to the next level and snake her neck a bit and begin moving towards the inattentive sole. If that doesn't convince him, she may plant her front feet and give the full effect of both hind feet. I guarantee you if she goes to that level she will have his full undivided attention. The next time she asks him to move he will be a little quicker on the draw.

Sometimes I wish it was that easy for us. It seems like I have to learn some things over and over again. I swear I never cease to be amazed. You might think of God's round pen as His Holy Word. It's there we read and are convicted by what we learn.

It's a wonderful mirror in which we can look and see ourselves. That's the mirror where we see God's masterpiece. It's there we see not how perfect people lived, but how people like us, people with blemishes, warts and all other kinds of imperfections lived.

We see people who committed murder, betrayed one another in thought, word and deed and just exactly what they did with it. It's all in there. There are no cover-ups or spin to make it look better. They are all people like us. They come in every shape, size and occupation, and we have the benefit of seeing how they lived their lives and the consequences and rewards therein.



“Oh, I can’t read the Bible,” you say, “that’s torture.”

It doesn’t have to be. Just as our round pens shouldn’t be torture for our horses, as I said before, the Bible shouldn’t be torture for us to read and learn from. Whether we are involved in pornography or gossip or just living out our day-to-day lives, the bible gives us the solutions to deal with all the issues, trials and tribulations.



So in this process, where and how do we begin teaching the horse? There are five things I look for when I'm teaching the horse to do anything new.

1. *Will he lick his lips?*
2. *Will he give me a willing ear?*
3. *Will he drop and relax his head?*
4. *Will he give me a big sigh?*
5. *Will he relax a hoof or bend a knee?*

I don't need all of them at once but different ones at different times tell me whether he's ready to learn or paying attention. The licking and chewing motion in the herd represents to the other horses that I am not a threat. You'll see foals make that funny mouthing motion when it is approached by a horse other than its mother.



Sometimes when we start working a horse in a round pen the only thing we can get them to do is run. In the beginning they think they are running from us. They are. But as they continue going around they soon realize that we are chasing them. And the horse being lazy by nature wants to stop pretty soon, and they begin signaling by licking their lips. What

they're saying is, "I'm not a threat. Can I renegotiate this deal? I want to stop." We let them stop and rest with us. They soon realize that we are their safe place. That is the beginning. Without that trust we can do nothing with the horse. They are bigger than we are, faster than we are. They are claustrophobic and throttleaholics.



We are no different. We are out here in the world running from God, doing whatever. We're at the casino trying to make next month's rent or the electric bill and when that doesn't work out we try something else. We may run from sin to sin trying to fill that God-shaped hole that everyone has with everything the world has to offer and finding no relief.

God is right there in the center of our round pen calling to us asking us to look at Him. In the midst of whatever nonsense we have created for ourselves, He is waiting for us to rest with Him. After we have exhausted all our efforts at finding peace and purpose in the things of the world, God is waiting to see if we will look to Him for the answers. He is waiting to see if we are, in essence, licking our lips. I believe that because we are sinners by nature and more often than not we don't look to Him. Like the horse, we may be afraid. We might say, "I don't want to be labeled some kind of religious lunatic." Alternatively, you might say, "I don't want to be a hypocrite."

I've got news for you. The church is not a place for people who are perfect. The church is a place for the sick. I'm one of them. Amen? People have said to me that they won't come to my church because they know someone down there that is a hypocrite. That's when I let them know that I'm one of them. God wants us to come as we are. We cannot cleanse ourselves anymore than the horse can teach himself to have good ground manners or do a flying lead change on cue. The horse must have a leader, and we need a leader too. There is only one leader who will guide us in spirit and truth, and that is Jesus Christ.





We stand in the center of the round pen extending our hand in a spirit of friendship and trust. We want the horse to come to us. We

want him to give to our direction. Generally in that he will have food, water, and shelter. It is there that we can care for him in a manner beyond his simple physical needs. It is there that we are more likely to want to care of him. It is with us that he attains a purpose greater than he could on his own. All that being said, he doesn't have to accept anything we have to offer.

Well, guess what? God is standing in the center of His round pen extending His grace and mercy to us. It is free. It is a gift. All we have to do is accept it. God is a perfect gentleman. He won't force us to accept anything he has to offer. We only need to give.

We need to understand that there is nothing we can do that is good enough, there is no amount of money we can spend to be righteous in the presence of God. The gift is free and like the horse, all we have to do is come to the center and rest with Him.

At the point that the horse joins up with us we can see if they are really listening. They may give us that ear while they're running from us, but it's not the same as listening with intent.



You wives know what I'm talking about. You ask your husband something, you're really trying to get an answer, but he is watching TV. When you stop at the appropriate place expecting an answer, he says, "What?"

When the horse drops his head we know he is relaxing. The horse is deepening the trust relationship. By lowering his head, he is showing that with our touch and in our presence he will begin the process of truly releasing himself to us. If you've ever had that experience, you know how wonderful it can be.

We too, when we come into the presence of God lower our heads. There with our heads lowered we humble ourselves before God.

*If my people, who are  
called by my name,  
will humble  
themselves and pray  
and seek my face, and  
turn from their wicked  
ways, then will I hear  
from heaven, and  
heal their lands.*

*2 Chronicles 7:14*



Humbling ourselves before a righteous God, the one who created us, who knew of our existence before the beginning of the world, who made us the masterpiece that we are, with all our gifts and abilities, is the right thing to do. If that is not enough for us to place ourselves humbly into the grand scheme of things, consider this:

*In the evenings, Theodore Roosevelt and his friend, the naturalist, William Beebe, would go out and look at the skies, searching for a tiny patch of light near the constellation of Pegasus. "This is the spiral galaxy in Andromeda," they would chant. "It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun." Then Roosevelt would turn to his companion and say, "Now I think we are small enough. Let's go to bed."*



In the beginning, the horse is wild and free running without any direction or purpose. If they don't come under control or gain some meaningful purpose in their life, there is every possibility they will end up at the sale barn. That is nothing less than destruction.



If we do not take God's leadership and guidance by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we too are headed for destruction. Remember sin is always black, hell is hot, eternity is long, but salvation is sure.



As I said before, the horse begins his life running free. If he is willing, he can come under our leadership and direction with the web halter. As he grows and learns, we graduate him to the rope halter. It is there that we fix, refine and reinforce all that it is we want him to do. We put

them on the bit for finishing, but when they are really good, we take all control off and it is then and there that they move with us willingly.



Is that not a perfect picture of our relationship with God? We accept Him as Lord and Savior. It is there that we begin a life-long relationship that grows as we read and pray, as we fellowship with other Christians. Through the good times and the bad He is there for us if we will just take that first step. He cannot teach us anything if we don't listen to Him. Day by day spending time is where it all begins.



## ***The Halter and the Lead....***

### ***H.A.L.T.E.R.***



When we are training, the purpose of the halter is to hone our technique and the horse's precision at executing the tasks we ask them to perform. If we can't get the horse to do a particular task off lead, we go back to the halter and lead to perfect the process. Sometimes it requires hours of practicing with real intent and purpose to get it right. If you can't do it on lead, you certainly can't

do it off lead. Remember, the answer is always much clearer for the teacher than it is for the pupil.

I like to think of God's halter as His Holy Word. It is a place that we can go and receive specific instruction on just exactly how it is that we should be living our lives. When we are hungry for the things of the world, He tells us that "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit." That doesn't mean that those who are physically poor will be blessed. What God is telling us here is that those "who are poor in spirit" those who hunger and thirst for the things of God will be blessed. That doesn't mean we will necessarily be monetarily blessed, but that God knows our heart and he will insure that we receive the things we need both physically and spiritually. So when Jesus, himself, is tempted by Satan after His forty days and

nights in the wilderness, He answers Satan with a quote from scripture, “Man does not live by bread alone, but every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

The horse’s halter is obviously a place where he gets a great deal of instruction from us. I prefer a rope halter because the message is a little clearer. You can get the message through to the horse with a nylon web halter, but it may take a little longer. I think it was Clinton Anderson I heard say that a web halter is a creek halter, “just throw it in the creek.” I think that’s because he wants real, clear communication between him and his horse. I like to think of it as the difference between the Holy Bible and a book about the bible.



***So when you are feeling Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired, Empty or Rejected, remember....***

- H. **Hungry:** He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.

*Deuteronomy 8:3*

- A. **Angry:** Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.

*Ephesians 4:26*

- L. **Lonely:** Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for Thou art with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

*Psalms 23:4*

- T. **Tired:** Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

*Matthew 11:29*

- E. **Empty:** whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life

*John 4:14*

- R. **Rejected:** Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: " 'The **stone** the builders **rejected** has become the capstone ; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes' ?

*Matthew 21:42*

God may use the halter to train us through circumstance, other people, His word, but He always LEADS us through.

## ***L.E.A.D.S.***

- L. God's Love:** Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever.

*Psalms 136:2*

- E. Enlightens:** I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength

*Ephesians 1:17-19*

- A. Affirms:** In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the Word of Truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

*James 1:18*

- D. Delivers:** The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

*Psalms 18:1*

- S. From Sin:** I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.

*Isaiah 44:22*



## *So, Why Do We Have Horses?*

We have them because they fill a special place within us. Why not? God is going to return on a white horse. We know they can bring great joy. The question is, can they fill that special place within us in such a way that we are never left wanting again? I think not, because most horse owners start with one, and like potato chips, one is never enough!

One of the reasons we are so attracted to horses is because of what they represent, *freedom*. We want some of that freedom. What better example could we have of that freedom than that of the horse running wild and free.

Freedom equals power. In that power, we have control over our lives. In our humanness, we think or believe that if we humble or give ourselves over to something or someone that we are enslaving ourselves. We are, and yet we do it every day. We give ourselves over to alcohol, drugs, sex, money, work. We end up trapped. Why would we want to become so enslaved or *meek* when freedom supposedly offers that wild, unrestrained lifestyle.

Giving ourselves over to someone or something involves willingly putting ourselves under someone or something's absolute control. That is not in our nature. How can we gain freedom by doing such a thing?

An act of such meekness surely can't be right, can it? I am here to tell you that it is. The term "meekness" is the same Greek word that was associated with Christ. It does not mean what so many of us have come to believe.





Alexander the Great owned a stallion that no one except him could control or handle. His name was Bucephalus. He was described by Plutarch as a massive creature with a massive head, having a black coat with a white star on his brow, and having a blue eye, and his breeding was that of the "best Thessalian strain."

The term given for meekness in the Greek is πραῦς (praus), which literally means **power under control**. Alexander the Great was able to harness all the power God had created in that magnificent horse, when no one else could, and use it for his purposes rather than have it exist in rebellion in an unproductive manner.



That term, πραῦς, "meekness," is the same Greek word that was associated with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



We want horses in our lives. It is my belief that it is in that relationship we are attempting to fill at least a part of that place within us that aches and longs for freedom. There is nothing wrong with that. The God who created us and the horse has given us natural longings and desires for the things that honor and glorify Him. Each one of those things works towards His ultimate purpose of the reclamation of the world unto Himself.

The horse begins wild and free. Under our stewardship he can choose to come under our guidance and leadership or choose to be a renegade, which may ultimately lead to his life being wasted as a pasture ornament or destruction at the sale barn.

***We can choose to run wild and free as a renegade or gain the greatest freedom of all under the leadership and direction of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.***





### ***About the Author....***

Ted Noland is an evangelist and pastor from Beggs, Oklahoma. He is also a farrier practicing natural and holistic hoof care, a horse trainer using Biblical and natural approaches, a participant in the 2007 Extreme Mustang Makeover, a Singer/Songwriter, father, and husband.



*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

*Psalms 1:1-2*