

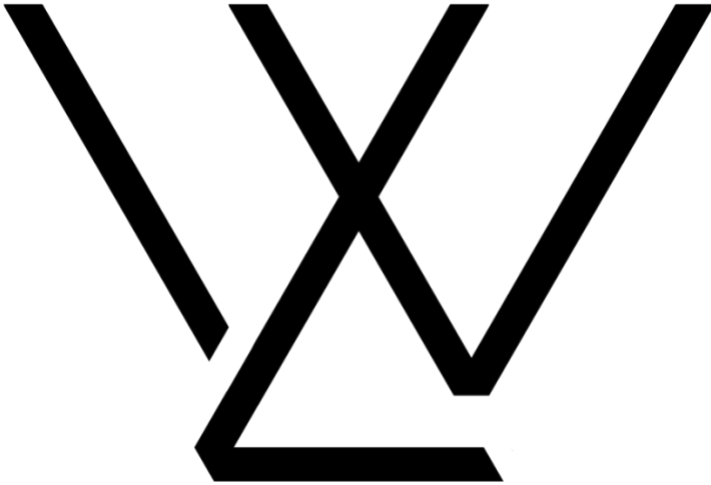
WEEKS 1-5

SERMON

ON THE MOUNT



MATTHEW 5:17-37



Word to Life studies are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

Contributors

Cean Henley, Sabino Medrano, Lucas Campbell, Casey Gustafson, Leeanna Porter, Jonathan O'Neill, Brent Wilson, Sarah Wilson, John Stone
Trevor Howard, Courtney Cobbs, Josh Mehling, Stephen Kimpel, Cohen Raney, Michael Musselman, Madeline Musselman, Molly Gomez

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- JUL. 29
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Week 1: Matthew 5:17-20

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 5:17-20

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity**: Jesus said that *He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them*. Using an online or physical concordance, where else does Matthew's gospel account talk about fulfillment? List some examples below.
 - **Question**: Why do you think the Bible connects Jesus with fulfillment so many times?

- **Question**: What do you think it means that Jesus came to fulfill the Law and Prophets?

- **Question:** Either by reading ahead in Matthew 5 or by reading the headings in your Bible, what specific areas of the Law did Jesus focus on as His preaching continued?

- **Activity:** Read Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 8:10, and 2 Corinthians 3:1-6. How do these passages connect to Jesus as the fulfiller?
 - **Question:** Would you say that your heart, mind, and life display that God's Law has been written on your heart? Why or why not?

- **Question:** We have spent some time already today talking about how Jesus fulfills the Law. Why do you think it is significant that He fulfills the Prophets as well?

Week 1: Matthew 5:17-20

Day 2: Fulfill the Law and the Prophets

READ: Matthew 5:17-20

EXPLORE:

Today we will focus on Matthew 5:17. In this verse Jesus says, *“Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”* Today we will discuss what Jesus means when He says He has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets; however before we discuss what it means to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, we must first ensure that we understand what is meant by “the Law and the Prophets.” The early church would have recognized this phrase to refer to the Tanakh, or Hebrew Bible, consisting of the Torah, Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). We commonly refer to this as the Old Testament.

The Greek word used for “fulfill” in Matthew 5:17 is “πληρώω” (Pléroó). Pléroó is the Greek term which comes from the root meaning “fill to the full.” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon suggests that the meaning in Matthew 5:17 means to universally and absolutely fulfill, to cause God’s will (as made know in the law) to be obeyed as it should be, and God’s promises (given through the prophets) to receive fulfillment. We can see Jesus’ fulfillment of the Old Testament by being the Messiah that the Old Testament pointed to. Jesus fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies.

Through this, He fulfilled many of God’s promises recorded in the Law and the Prophets. In addition, Jesus fills up the Law and the Prophets in His teachings. Jesus interprets the Torah and gives people a thorough understanding of how-to live in accordance with its teachings. We will be covering some of Jesus’ interpretations and teaching of the Ten Commandments in the weeks ahead. Jesus also fulfills the law by establishing a new relationship with God. This is finally fulfilled when the Holy Spirit

Week 1: Matthew 5:17-20

Day 3: More Righteous than the Pharisees

READ: Matthew 5:17-20; Romans 10:3-4; 2 Peter 3:7

EXPLORE:

The Pharisees were considered the most righteous people of their day. They made sure to set aside 10% of their garden herbs for God.¹ They avoided doing anything that might be considered work on the Sabbath. They fasted regularly and prayed eloquently. So, imagine the disciples' shock when Jesus told them they had to be even more righteous than the Pharisees to enter heaven.

In Matthew 5-7, Jesus explained what it looks like to be more righteous than the Pharisees. Instead of trying to fix everyone else's external behavior, you realize your own need for a heart change. You enter through the narrow gate and build your house on Christ the solid rock. You seek your reward from God, not from people or money. Instead of *acting* righteous to be praised by others, you *become* so righteous that some will glorify God because of you and others will persecute you for it.

It's hard to be more righteous than the Pharisees if you try to beat them at their own game, seeking to establish your own righteousness. But it's not hard to be more righteous than the Pharisees if you clothe yourself in Christ's righteousness. As soon as you surrender and cry out for deliverance, you're already more righteous than the Pharisees. You exchange the filthy rags of a fake, phony self-righteousness which is offensive to God for a real, imputed, life-changing, soul-saving righteousness from God.

Jesus reminded us to teach and obey the commandments. After giving examples of how we should directly apply some of the commandments today, He gave the Golden Rule as a summary.

¹ See Matthew 23:23 for reference.

Rather than neglecting the Old Testament, we must be careful to apply it rightly in light of Christ's fulfillment. As we study the Old Testament, we need divine wisdom to discern how each commandment informs our life as God's New Testament people. Many commandments help us understand how God's Old Testament people were to worship Him and follow the Golden Rule. In thinking through why God gave these commands to Israel, we discern principles to live by today.

Scripture reminds us that there will come a day when there will be a new heaven and a new earth. While this heaven and earth remain, the commandments are still "living and active... discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."² On Judgment Day, the heaven which includes the sun, moon, and stars will be destroyed along with this earth. We should store up treasure in the new heavens and the new earth—the many rooms of Jesus' Father's house, where He has gone to prepare a place for us.³ There is a sure and solid hope found in the righteousness made available only through faith in Christ!

BIG IDEA: Matthew 5-7 describes the true righteousness that we receive through faith in Christ.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How might Christians be tempted to relax one of the least of these commandments?

- **Question:** Should Christians obey every commandment in the Old Testament? If not, how do you reconcile that with Matthew 5:17-20?

² See Hebrews 4:12 for reference.

³ See John 14:2 for reference.

Week 1: Matthew 5:17-20

Day 4: The Least and Great

READ: Matthew 5:17-20

EXPLORE:

Whether we are sitting around the dinner table or stuck in traffic, my (Michael Musselman's) family loves to rank things: top three movies, best HEB ice cream flavor, or the greatest Astro of all-time (it's Altuve by the way, sorry Biggio and Nolan). The kids even try to get my wife and I to pick our favorite child, and then proceed to build their cases when we won't bite.

The disciples would also indulge themselves in similarly fruitless debates as to which of them was the greatest disciple. It was evident that they knew it was wrong, because they were ashamed when they got caught. Jesus would then use those teachable moments to educate them on how everyone would actually be ranked in His kingdom.

Jesus critiqued the typical ways that we inappropriately think we will be ranked in the kingdom of heaven. First, Jesus' teaching reminds us to be wary of the self-righteousness of the Pharisees who rigged "the game" by creating their own extra rules and regulations. If the disciples wanted earthly power and prestige like the scribes and Pharisees, then keep following their worldly blueprint and "you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Second, Jesus' teaching reminds us to continually understand the value of the Law as it would be written on people's hearts.

If you read Matthew 5:19 too quickly, you might think Jesus contrasts the path to being the least with the path to becoming the greatest. He doesn't. In His divine consistency, He has already

established that He is not going to rank His greatest disciples in His kingdom. He defines what it takes to “be called great” not “greatest” in His heavenly kingdom: accurately teach and follow the commandments and they “will be called great.” In Matthew 11:11, Jesus tells them that John the Baptist was the greatest human being up until that point and yet even he would fall short of anyone worthy enough to become a part of Jesus’ heavenly kingdom.

Do not worry about being the greatest in everyone’s eyes. Focus on being truly “great” in God’s eyes. For the greatest commandment is to love God and love others, and we cannot do that if we are constantly worried about where we rank in everyone else’s greatest Christian lists.

BIG IDEA: The path to the kingdom of heaven is not through the approval of others. It is through following and teaching God’s commandments.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What areas of your life (church, work, family) are you more concerned with appearing righteous than being righteous?

- **Activity:** Zoom in on that area and pray for God’s forgiveness and guidance on how best to reorient your heart with God’s.

Week 1: Matthew 5:17-20

Day 5: Exceeding Righteousness

READ TOGETHER: Matthew 23:23-24, Ezra 7:10, Hebrews 8:10-13

***Instructions:** We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Imagine if God told you that unless you are a better baseball player than Babe Ruth you will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. I think it is safe to say that we all would feel hopeless and defeated. We would think that God has done us a terrible injustice. I (Sabino) suppose that begins to scratch the surface of what the disciples were feeling when they first heard Jesus say their righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees.

How could this be done? Well, Jesus gives us the answer in the passage. First, he wants us to know that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them. Jesus came preaching a message of the kingdom, but that kingdom message did not destroy the Old Testament message. If the Old Testament message was not destroyed, then they ought not break or minimize the law and prophets (keep in mind that the New Covenant had not yet been instituted). Nevertheless, the Pharisees were doing this very thing. Jesus said they ignored the weightier matters of the law. So, they not only relaxed the least of the commandments, but also the greater ones. But whoever will do them and teach them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Week 2: Matthew 5:21-26

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 5:21-26

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, make some initial observations concerning what you notice in the Bible passage.

- **Question:** In your opinion, is there one overarching theme or consistent thread in vv. 21-26 or are there multiple focuses? Please explain and defend your answer below.

- **Questions:** Jesus made sure to highlight the heart condition that existed below the sin which occurred. When have you been convicted of a sinful heart even though your actions didn't seem to display it?

- **Question:** Scripture speaks about righteous anger and unrighteous anger. Is it easy for you to distinguish between the two in your own life? Why or why not?

- **Question:** We read, *“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”*
 - How do you think we should apply this verse in life today?

- **Question:** In the passage we are studying this week, Jesus seems to clearly address unrighteous anger, inappropriate speech, and a need for reconciliation. In what ways do you think God might be convicting you of sin in one or more of the underlined areas above?
 - **Activity:** Spend some time in written reflection and prayer concerning your response to the question above.

Week 2: Matthew 5:21-26

Day 2: The Six Antitheses

READ: Matt. 5:21-22, 5:27-28, 5:31-32, 5:33-34, 5:38-39, 5:43-44

EXPLORE:

Our passage this week marks the beginning of a section in the Sermon on the Mount commonly referred to in academic circles as the six antitheses. This is where Jesus draws a comparison and contrast across six different topics with the repeated wording “*you have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you.*” And critical to our understanding of Jesus’ teachings is an initial question that arises from these antitheses: What is Jesus actually contrasting here?

Historically, a few potential answers to this question have been offered. First, Jesus might be contrasting the original Old Testament law with an entirely new law that he is standing up in its place. This is probably not the best interpretation, however, because it appears to fly in the face of Jesus’ explicit statement in Matthew 5:17 that “*I have not come to abolish [the law].*”⁴ A second option is that Jesus is contrasting original Old Testament teaching with an extended and expanded set of expectations he’s introducing. Jesus is, in a sense, raising the bar for citizens of the New Testament kingdom by adding a new dimension to the original law. This interpretation also runs into a few problems, however. The phrase “*you have heard that it was said*” is not the typical way Jesus refers to Scripture. When quoting the Old Testament, Jesus almost always uses the phrase “*it is written*” suggesting, perhaps, that he is comparing his teachings to something other than the original Old Testament text. In fact, this does seem to be the case in a number of instances. In Matthew 5:21 we read: “*You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’*” At

⁴ Jesus’ use of the phrase “*the Law or the Prophets*” in 5:17 almost certainly refers to the entirety of OT scripture, not just the moralistic laws or regulations seemingly in view in Matthew 5:21-48. Nevertheless, Jesus is clearly adamant that no part of OT teaching, law or otherwise, is being superseded, replaced, or abolished here.

first, this looks like a direct quote from the sixth commandment, but nowhere in the Old Testament are we told that *“whoever murders will be liable to judgement.”* This is an extrabiblical addition, and although it doesn’t appear to be completely out of step with biblical teaching, it is an addition nonetheless. Even more apparent though, in Matthew 5:43 we read: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”* The command to *“love your neighbor”* is found in Leviticus 19:18, but nowhere does the Bible teach to *“hate your enemy”*. This is a clear distortion, which introduces a third possible answer to our original question. Perhaps Jesus is presenting a contrast between his teachings and the commonly accepted scriptural interpretations (or rather, misinterpretations) being perpetuated by the Pharisees in his day.

Rather than replacing Old Testament law, or adding additional layers to it, Jesus is quite possibly explaining the true nature of the original law in contrast to distorted understandings and faulty teachings. Jesus says that anger equals murder and lust equals adultery. Why? Because God’s law was never just about outward appearance. It was never just about tangible rules you could publicly check off in front of others so as to declare yourself righteous. God always cared about the heart and the law always pointed to the need for a proper heart posture. This is critical because if we think of God’s law as only being about external actions, we might just fool ourselves into thinking we don’t need grace near as much as we do. The impossible standard of internal perfection, however, makes clear our need for Jesus, and the Sermon on the Mount teaches us that the law has always been designed to do just that — drive us straight to him.

BIG IDEA: The OT law has always carried an internal component because it was always meant to point us to our need for Jesus.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you agree with the perspective that Jesus is combating poor teaching and reinforcing what the OT law was always meant to point to? Why or why not?

Week 2: Matthew 5:21-26

Day 3: What is Hindering Reconciliation?

READ: Matthew 5:21-26 and I Corinthians 6:1-7

EXPLORE:

I (Stephen) am sure that you know this specific feeling. Maybe you had an interaction with someone that didn't go well. Maybe you hurt someone's feelings unintentionally. Maybe it wasn't so unintentional.

Regardless, I am sure you know the feeling of lingering tensions in a relationship that you, at one time, thought would simply go away. You prayed, you searched the Scriptures, you sought out wise counsel, and it still felt as though the conflict lingered and the relational gap increased. In this not-so-hypothetical experience we are discussing today, we ought to be reminded of God's heart for reconciliation which is evidenced in Jesus' words.

Jesus said, "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."⁵

In the statements above, Jesus continued to expand His teaching concerning sinful anger and the Christian's call to pursue reconciliation. The passage's context seems to make it clear that the pending court case has to do with an unpaid debt. In the same way that a person who is "*offering a gift at the altar*" should go and reconcile, Jesus was clearly encouraging the accused to proactively seek resolution with their accuser. Simply, those who are following Jesus should make attempts to not let unhealthy relationships go unresolved.

⁵ See Matthew 5:25-26 for reference.

In Paul's writing to the church in the ancient city of Corinth, he discussed similar situational tensions. The church in that city was struggling to effectively embody the distinctiveness of the gospel in their community. Even though they were Christians, they were defrauding one another and consistently taking each other to court. Paul wrote, *"To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!"*⁶

Like Jesus, the Apostle Paul was not encouraging Christians to deny or avoid justice, but rather to pursue reconciliation! I am confident that neither I Corinthians 6 nor Matthew 5 are designed to give Christians a universal legal precedent. Both passages are a clear reminder that living as citizens in God's kingdom must impact our earthly relationships. If the ultimate reconciliatory act has occurred in the death and resurrection of Jesus then we ought to embrace the importance of reconciliation not just in our theology, but with our very lives!

BIG IDEA: Christians should proactively pursue reconciliation.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and don't forget vv. 18-19. Where does your life and faith need to specifically grow to better pursue reconciliation?

⁶ See I Corinthians 6:7-8 for reference.

Week 2: Matthew 5:21-26

Day 4: Anger and Reconciliation

READ: Matthew 5:21-26

EXPLORE:

When we think of anger maybe we think of a burning hot rage that bubbles up and powerfully bursts forth, or perhaps we think of one that festers quietly inside, rotting us from the inside out. Either way, a fleshly anger has the potential to cause death and destruction in the heart of the person in whom it is found and their surroundings. Anger, however, is not inherently evil, but is an emotion that can lead to unrighteousness if felt over wrong things and if allowed to take charge of our actions. How, one might ask, is an emotion so hard to bridle ever felt righteously, and how could it possibly lead to actions that are glorifying God?

In the Bible we have examples of righteous anger. Many times, as the Lord led His people through the wilderness, His anger was kindled against them for their rebellious and faithless acts. We can notice a few things about the righteous anger of God: It is not quick or provoked by petty offenses. It is sparked when His people disobey His commands and dishonor Him. When it is acted upon, it is without sin because God is the ultimate Judge with the authority to punish. Think for a second about the last few things that made you angry and how you reacted to them. Were you provoked to anger by the state of the world and how it grieves our Lord, or upset by the idolatry of self that exists around us and dishonors God? I must say that I cannot think of anything besides minute grievances with others over what they have done or said to me. These things are small and seemingly harmless, never coming to a head. Jesus tells us through His word, that it is not only how we react from our anger, but the state of our hearts in anger that make us liable to judgment.⁷ The implications of this are heavy. Sinful anger starts in the heart, and we are guilty as soon as we've felt such anger towards our brother. Moreover, holding onto bitterness without seeking reconciliation hinders our ability to worship. Worship that is acceptable and pure is offered with reverence and awe. Living in a state of unforgiveness is detrimental to spiritual health, as living with unforgiveness is living with unrepentant sin.⁸

⁷ See Matthew 5:21-22 for continued reference.

⁸ Read Psalm 66:17-18 and Psalm 139:23-24 for reference.

In the verse above, the verb used to describe the action is cherish. This seems like an odd usage of the word, given that the object is iniquity in the writer's heart. However, it is just the right way to describe an unforgiving and bitter heart. When we cherish something, we caringly cultivate it and harbor it deep inside. When we fail to forgive a brother we regard our own pride and false sense of justice higher than our worship, thus making it unacceptable to God. We must come to the Lord with reverence and awe. This means surrendering all our hurt unto Him with contrition, and humbly acknowledging that his Grace is sufficient. When we have faith and repent we are reconciled to God, but Jesus highlights the importance of also seeking reconciliation with our brothers. When we know that our brother is also hurting, and that the conflict is not only an internal battle with unforgiveness, but an exterior dispute, we must humbly go to them to seek reconciliation. This does not guarantee that we will be pardoned by them, but asking for forgiveness from the Lord first and then our brother means that we have let go of the iniquity that hindered our worship and have opened our hearts to be broken and formed by God through worship.

Getting our priorities in order and cherishing the Word of God above all things will help us to bridle our angry emotions. Looking at the world through a lens of faith lets us see clearly, and we will begin to be grieved by what grieves the Lord, delighted in His statutes, and angered by what transgresses His word. Unforgiveness is sometimes harbored subconsciously, so it is important that we are aware of it and remain sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. Surrendering to the will of God and relying on Him to guide us along the path of righteousness leads to true freedom. The process of reconciliation is sometimes painful but is crucial to a sacrificial life of worship.

BIG IDEA: Sinful anger begins with an iniquitous state of the heart and hinders our ability to worship if we do not seek reconciliation.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Have you felt righteous anger? If yes, how does it manifest itself differently from sinful anger?
- **Question:** We are not always aware when we are cherishing iniquity and unforgiveness in our hearts. If we are unaware of the bitterness we harbor, how does it still hinder our worship?

Week 2: Matthew 5:21-26

Day 5: Anger

READ TOGETHER: Genesis 9:5-6, James 1:20, 1 Peter 2:13-17

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Have you ever been taught to do something in the wrong way? I (Sabino) remember when I first learned the proper stance to hit a baseball. I thought to myself, “Why has no one taught me this before?” In a much more meaningful way, the Jews had been taught the law many times, but never the way Jesus was about to.

The Jews knew the commandments, but Jesus taught that they were spiritual. They had heard from their forefathers that murderers were liable to judgment, but they never learned any more than this. In other words, the law only remained external to them, because that is how their teachers taught them. They didn’t need to worry about the inner man, as long as they performed their outward duties. Not killing a man was good enough.

But Jesus taught them that whoever is simply angry with his brother is liable to judgment. Others may not know you are angry, but you still stand under the judgment of God. Whoever insults or slanders his brother would be liable to the Sanhedrin. Now the real shocker. Whoever calls his brother a fool will be liable to hell fire. The modern equivalent is like telling someone to go to hell. This kind of anger and speech puts a man in danger of hell fire. Jesus goes on to say that if you have a rift with your brother

(fellow man), you also have a rift with God. We cannot be angry with our brother and have proper communion or fellowship with God. Also, if we have wronged our brother then we need to humble ourselves and seek to make proper restoration. If not, we may find ourselves in prison and paying off a debt. Our sentence will be just and fair since we have not humbled ourselves and made reconciliation.

I hope we can see how serious God takes our thoughts and words. Cain did not guard his heart seriously enough. He justified his anger and it caused him to murder his brother. We can see that Cain's sin started before the act of murder. May we guard our hearts and live peaceably with all men, as much depends on us.

BIG IDEA: Anger is internal before it manifests outwardly.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus makes anger such a big deal?

- **Question:** Sometimes we can be angry for the right reasons. Can you give an example in the Bible and in everyday life?

Week 3: Matthew 5:27-30

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 5:27-30

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus used intense wording when He talked about (1) how you should respond to lust and (2) repercussions of sin?

- **Question:** When He spoke about gouging out an eye and cutting off a hand, do you think Jesus was using a figure of speech or was He advocating mutilation?

- **Question:** Do you think that Jesus' guidance about responding to lust by cutting off a hand and gouging out an eye could apply to anything we might covet? Why or why not?

- **Question:** Job is a biblical book which features a righteous man experiencing incredible suffering and loss. Read Job 31:1-4 and reflect on his words below. What do you notice?

- **Question:** Jesus considered lust in one’s heart a sin. Even though many people think they don’t have a choice, what we allow our eyes, mind, and heart to dwell in should be conformed to Christ if we are believers. In what ways is Matthew 5:27-30 personally challenging to you in this way?

- **Activity:** God takes sexual sin very seriously. Read the passages below concerning God’s serious view of sin and his high view of purity. NOTE: *This activity is longer but is valuable.*
 - Leviticus 18

 - Matthew 19:4-6

 - I Corinthians 6:9-10

 - I Corinthians 6:18

 - Galatians 5:19-21

 - Ephesians 5

 - I Thessalonians 4:3-5

 - Hebrews 13:4

Week 3: Matthew 5:27-30

Day 2: Exploring the Dangers of Pornography

READ: Matthew 5:27-30

EXPLORE:

It is my (Madeline's) hope and my prayer that if you are deeply entrenched in this addiction, that you do not skip over today's reading. For it is never too late to change, to talk to someone, and to give it all to God.

Let's go to statistics class:

- Pornography use increases the marital infidelity rate by more than 300%.
- 11 is the average age that a child is first exposed to pornography, and 94% of children will see porn by the age of fourteen.
- Among young Christian adults eighteen to twenty-four years old, 76% actively search for pornography.
- The study showed that 55% of married men and 25% of married women say they watch pornography once a month.
- 56% of American divorces involve one party having an "obsessive interest" in pornographic websites.
- An estimated 68% of church going men and over 50% of pastors view pornography on a regular basis.
- Only 13% of self-identifying Christian women say they never watch porn. 87% of Christian women have watched porn.⁹

Some specifics above might be challenged, but the trends don't lie. We are in the midst of a dangerous epidemic. I wanted to make a couple notes regarding these statistics. First, we need to notice how young kids are when first exposed. Second, we need to notice how prevalent this addiction is in professing Christians. Porn destroys marriages, relationships, and it conditions your brain in ways that are deeply damaging.¹⁰

⁹ See *Challenging Conversations* by Jason Jimenez for study information.

¹⁰ Chasing Love by Sean McDowell is a valuable resource for further reference.

Jesus said, “*But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*”¹¹ Porn destroys the trust and sacredness of marriage. While I think it is extremely important to note how common porn addictions are, I don’t want anyone to think that it is so common that it’s normal and therefore not a concern. Ferrer and Davison wrote, “We’ve said it before, and we’ll say it again: normal is not the same thing as moral.”¹² We are called to not live for the world but for God. Jason Jimenez summarizes this well, saying, “the aim of pornography isn’t to love or be motivated to cherish the great sense of pleasure shared between a husband and a wife. Porn is one sided and its consumption is having severe neurological effects on both men and women which leads to emotional instability, intimacy deficiency, and, most importantly, spiritual insufficiency.”¹³

We are called to live for Jesus and to remain pure in spirit. Porn actively does the opposite of that by glorifying lust and impurity.

Personally, I think it’s very important to note that everyone struggles with sin. That’s why Jesus died on the cross, to atone for sin’s penalty. No sin is ever too big to give to Jesus. Living in darkness is painful. Come to the light of Christ, come to forgiveness and mercy. Repent and experience restoration and reconciliation with God through Christ by the Holy Spirit.

BIG IDEA: Lust is the opposite of love and it damages the sacredness of marriage and God’s design for intimacy.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Spend time praying for purity and developing relationships of accountability in accordance with God’s Word.

¹¹ See Matthew 5:28 for reference.

¹² See Mama Bear Apologetics for reference.

¹³ See *Challenging Conversations* by Jason Jimenez for reference.

Week 3: Matthew 5:27-30

Day 3: Kill your Lizard

READ: Matthew 5:27-30

EXPLORE:

This passage gives us an extreme response to when we find ourselves committing sin. But is it really extreme or do we just perceive it as extreme? Is this radical reaction actually what it means for every Christian to respond rightly to sin? I (Courtney) would argue that it is. In C. S. Lewis' book, *The Great Divorce*, Lewis depicts a young man who is being tortured by a red lizard that sits on his shoulder. This lizard, representing the man's indwelling sin, mocks and torments the man with lies and shame. As this man is enduring the affliction of his shoulder demon, an angel approaches and promises the man that he can free him from the red lizard's torments. The man delights in this hope of freedom! He thinks that he can finally be rid of this suffering! As the angel then wants to kill the lizard in order that the man may be free, the young man is filled with horror. He is baffled at the idea of killing the lizard and he begins to argue with the angel to do it another time or simply make him be quiet for now instead of killing him. This is a sad, but accurate, representation of how we perceive our sin. We, so often, do not actually want to put our sin to death, we would rather keep it, but Jesus calls us to tear out our very eyes if they cause us to sin just to avoid the temptation in the future! If we claim to be lovers of Jesus, we must hate our sin just as much. Romans 8:12-13 says, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

The voices of sin and shame are loud in our minds, especially when it comes to habitual sins as a believer. They tell us that we will never be enough, that we are too far gone for Jesus, and that God cannot forgive us. But these are lies from the enemy. There is hope for restoration and redemption. 1 John 1:9 gives us hope to find restoration with the Lord again if we would only confess of our sins. But true repentance comes

with life change. True confession is not simply an apology, but a commitment through the Holy Spirit to live rightly. This can be done by understanding that the more we give in to sin, the more we give the enemy a foothold over us to lead us into further sin. We must understand that it is essential to take every single thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5) for the sake of purity of mind and body and self-control (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). Sin begins in the mind, and we are provided a choice and a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). We must press into the Holy Spirit for help to fight against temptation and kill sin so that we can be in right relationship with Jesus.

BIG IDEA: We cannot love Jesus and love sin at the same time. We must destroy sin by taking one thought captive at a time through the power of the Holy Spirit.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you want your “red lizard” to die or are there aspects of it that you love and want to keep? What is it going to take for you to hate sin as much as God does?

- **Activity:** Make a list of your most common, habitual sins. Take time to pray over each one, surrender them to the Lord, and ask that He would give you a deep hatred of each one.

Week 3: Matthew 5:27-30

Day 4: Love ≠ lust

READ: Matthew 5:27-30

EXPLORE:

This is day four of dealing with the topic of lust, are you uncomfortable yet? As much as we should run to Scripture to comfort us, we should run to scripture when we need correction. The hope is that this week's study did not draw you into a pit of shame, but that it would have been much needed heart surgery, or a very revealing, full body scan, that has brought you closer to answers and to healing. Today's focus is on love in its purest form.

Biblical love is a gift from God. This kind of love is no longer natural, as in the garden, because sin entered the picture. Dictionaries define lust as a strong, or unbridled, sexual desire. Love, an intense feeling or deep affection. But the very best descriptions are found in scripture, such as 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Ephesians 5:25-27, Song of Solomon 8:6-7 and Colossians 3:12-14 to name a few. These Scriptures frame love God's way should be turned to when confused about what love does and does not look like. Lust and love are not the same, but share a common denominator: the eyes, heart, and mind.

Since we cannot get rid of these (the gouging out the eyes is only metaphorical), we must understand how we can live a Godly life and walk in a pure kind of love despite our sinful present bodies.

We cannot always and completely control what passes before our eyes, intrusive thoughts, or even what causes our hearts to feel something. Be reminded of Jesus, however. The Scriptures say that He was tempted in EVERY way. He interacted with sinners, tax collectors, women known to be sinners, not once did any of this cause Jesus to sin. Our eyes, minds, and hearts can serve as filters through which we take images and information and decide what to do with them. As Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew 15, it's not what goes into the body, but what comes out of the heart that defiles him. We have every tool we need to achieve God's purposes and work according to His design for biblical, Godly love,

according to 1 Peter 1:3. I suggest reading this scripture to verse 9 before ending.

I (Sarah) was recently at a wedding and the officiant asked the couple to look each other in the eyes to make their vows. Many other weddings it is said “turn and look at one another and repeat after me.” But the command for the eyes struck me. I realized that the same eyes that you bring to look purposefully, and deeply, and choose to lust, are the same eyes that you can look and purposefully choose pure love.

We all desperately and daily need God’s strength, no one has arrived on their own, or at all. But be encouraged that it is possible for God to cleanse our eyes, hearts, and minds to love with a pure and Godly love. We have everything we need.

BIG IDEA: Pure love is possible, though not easy. But with God all things are made possible.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Choose any of the scriptures referenced to meditate on, read it daily and nightly and pray specifically that God would work in your heart, specifically against lust and towards having a pure and right love towards others.

Week 3: Matthew 5:27-30

Day 5: Adultery

READ TOGETHER: Job 31:1, James 1:14-15, 2 Peter 2:14-15

Instructions: We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Remember when your parents told you to clean your room and you shoved everything in your closet or underneath your bed? They then had to inform you that this is not what they meant nor the proper way to clean your room. Our passage reminds me of this scenario. When God commands us not to commit adultery, he means much more than just the physical act.

Jesus teaches us that to look at a woman lustfully is to commit adultery in our heart. Oh, it may not have taken place with our hands, but it has taken place in our hearts. This is a hard saying. Who can control their hearts and their appetites? Well, our Lord tells us that we can and that we ought. Joseph, in the book of Genesis is a great example of this kind of righteousness. He does not entertain the advances of Potiphar's wife. Had he dwelt upon them in his thought he would have been too weak to resist the temptation.

Jesus gives us a graphic example of what to do if we cannot control ourselves. We are to tear our eye out if it causes us to sin and we are to cut off our right hand if it causes us to sin. No physical pain or loss of one body part is as dreadful as our whole body being thrown into hell forever. Now, Jesus does not mean for us to take his words literally, for a man can sin with his left eye and left hand just as easily. He is trying to teach us how seriously God takes the sin of adultery and show us how seriously we should take it. We must put it to death in its beginnings

before it becomes full blown. The proper fear of hell can keep us from entertaining evil.

Thoughts, fantasies, and daydreaming are not innocent. We ought not deceive ourselves into thinking it is only wrong if we do something with our body. The best way to defeat these sins is to walk in the Spirit so that we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

BIG IDEA: Adultery of the heart is just as real as adultery with the body.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus was so graphic in his prescriptions to adultery?

- **Question:** How can we fight against internal lust?

Week 4: Matthew 5:31-32

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 5:31-32 and Deuteronomy 24:1

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Question:** In Jesus' day, many people used Deuteronomy 24:1 to excuse a divorce for almost any reason. How did Jesus' words counteract that idea?

- **Activity:** In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus spoke specifically about divorce. Compare and contrast the following passages using the sections below as a structure for your study.¹⁴
 - Matthew 5:31-32
 - Audience:
 - Context:
 - Teaching:

 - Mark 10:1-12
 - Audience:
 - Context:
 - Teaching:

 - Luke 16:14-18
 - Audience:
 - Context:
 - Teaching:

¹⁴ Audience- Who was Jesus talking to? Context- What was happening?
Teaching: What did Jesus say?

- **Question:** Using an online or physical concordance, where else does the New Testament reference divorce in addition to Matthew, Mark, and Luke? What did you find?

- **Question:** Sometimes, biblical reasons for divorce are considered before biblical exhortations for reconciliation are considered. Why do you think that is the case?

- **Question:** The Scriptures hold an incredibly high view of the marriage covenant and fidelity. How does that high view influence the way you view dating, engagement, and pre-marriage counseling respectively?

Week 4: Matthew 5:31-32

Day 2: Together Forever

READ: Matthew 19:8-9; Mk 10:2-4, 11; Lk 16:18

EXPLORE:

To say that our loving and merciful God hates certain things can come across harsh. However, there is nothing contradictory about God being love and expressing hate. Malachi 2:16 says, *“God hates divorce.”* The last thing a believer wants to do is something that God hates. To understand why the Bible uses such strong language about divorce we need to understand the purpose of marriage.

On a heavenly level - Marriage is a symbol of unification between Christ and the church (His bride). It was designed to mirror the covenant relationship, self-sacrifice, and lifelong faithfulness of God to His people. On an earthly level – Marriage is the covenant unification between a man and woman for companionship and procreation. It is when two become one. Each one learning to self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and faithfulness. Divorce is the disintegration of this commitment and oneness. It impacts the man, the woman, any children involved, friendships, and finances. It is painful and messy every time. With this information laid out, let’s look at our verses. *“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

In the culture of ancient Israel, there was a law that said a man could divorce his wife if she no longer found favor in his eyes.¹⁵ So, if a woman got old and wrinkled, spoke with a loud voice, or didn’t put enough salt on the meat, her husband could end the marriage. It was a gross misinterpretation and misapplication of Scripture indeed. He had to do two things: write her a certificate of divorce and then send her from his house. The problem was many men were doing the latter but not the former. They would put their wife out on the street without giving her a certificate of divorce. This was called wife-dumping which had such a

¹⁵ See Deuteronomy 24:1 for reference.

stain on Jewish history that the Jews have a special name for a woman who is sent away without a certificate. She is called an *agunah* or 'chained wife.' She no longer has a husband to provide for her, but since she is technically married, she could not remarry. If either one of them pursued another relationship, acting as though they were divorced when they were still married, they would be committing adultery.

On a more fundamental level, it is important to remember that marriage is deeply sacred and a shadow of God's commitment to mankind, so to end it is an egregious offense to God.¹⁶ Jesus elevates the seriousness of divorce and focused the criteria on sexual immorality (*porneia*).

We may think getting a divorce because your spouse burps too much is insane, but many marriages today dissolve for equally petty reasons. We grew apart; we have different goals; I just don't love them anymore. Divorce rates are so high that many people shy away from pursuing this beautiful, albeit trying, relationship thereby missing out on the benefits it brings and the purpose it serves. Marriage, lived out according to God, is a blessing. Many of us have been divorced and maybe even remarried. Let me (Cean) reassure you that Jesus cares and forgiveness is possible.¹⁷

BIG IDEA: Choose wisely in marriage and commit to faithfulness.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you struggle with fear of getting married or guilt over a divorce? Seek God for truth and healing.

- **Challenge:** Pray that marriage would be seen by all as the reflection of God's permanent love for His people.

¹⁶ See Matthew 19:6 for reference.

¹⁷ See I John 1:9 for reference.

Week 4: Matthew 5:31-32

Day 3: Divorce & Remarriage

READ: Matthew 5:31-32, 1 Corinthians 7

EXPLORE:

There are many heartbreaking situations I (Josh Sharpe) have faced in ministry. Near the top of the list is navigating the sensitive subject of divorce and remarriage. Many in our church have experienced the devastation of divorce but have also received the blessing of a healthy remarriage. However, not all divorce and remarriage are created equal, so today we are going to lay out what the Bible has to say about divorce and remarriage to understand when God gives permission for these things. We must start by understanding the significance of the marriage covenant. Marriage is God's good design and meant for one man and one woman for life. This sacred union has the intended purposes of reflecting the very image of God (Genesis 1:27-28), producing godly offspring (Malachi 2:15), and to reflect the love between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Due to the sacredness of this union God never approves of divorce under any circumstance. That is, God never looks upon any divorce as a good thing. All divorce comes because of sin, which God hates, and it saddens His heart to see His image bearers hurting. However, though God never promotes divorce, He has compassion towards those affected by sin and extends permission for divorce in two circumstances: adultery and abandonment.

(1) Adultery In Jesus' teaching on this he says, "*whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery*" (Matthew 19:9) This is providing an exception in the case of unfaithfulness of a spouse. In this case, divorce is not required, but it is permitted. It is worth of note that the term used for adultery is *porneia*, which is where we get our word for pornography. This term has a broader range for sexual immorality in general, not merely adultery. One could argue that grounds for divorce could be found for the unrepentant porn addict or the spouse that engaged in sexual activity besides intercourse. Permission therefore is given to the offended party on the grounds of sexual unfaithfulness. **(2) Abandonment** In 1 Corinthians 7, the Apostle Paul is addressing marriage issues. As he encourages the believing spouse to stay married to the unbelieving spouse, he continues in verse 15 that "if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases, the brother or sister is not

enslaved. God has called you to peace.” This seems to leave room that if one abandons their marriage, the abandoned partner has biblical grounds to divorce. In both cases, it is of great importance that church leadership be involved in the process to help provide counseling, wisdom, and guidance. This provides covering and protection for the person that would take liberty with their “biblical permission” as well as for the spouse that legitimately moves forward with divorce.

What About Abuse? People often seek to add abuse as the third allowance, but I (Pastor Josh) believe this would be an addition to the Scripture that we are not permitted to add. However, this does not mean anyone is required to live in environments that are abusive. I believe one can and should separate in cases of abuse while maintaining faithfulness to their marriage covenant. The hope is that the abuser repents and receives help so that the marriage be restored. It has been my experience that in this case, the abuser often becomes guilty of adultery or abandonment which leads to the abused partner divorcing on biblical grounds.

PERMISSIONS FOR REMARRIAGE For the sake of time, I will abbreviate my understanding of what Scripture says on remarriage though I would encourage the Christian to study this in more depth. It is widely held that remarriage is permitted to the offended party that sought divorce on biblical grounds. The offending party, the one who committed adultery or abandoned their spouse, does not have biblical grounds for divorce and therefore would be committing adultery by remarrying. Jesus says in Mark 10:11, “¹¹Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” What is most important to recognize is the grace of God in the midst of these situations. God can restore very broken marriages. God can bring a godly spouse to a divorced person. God can give great joy and purpose to the repentant believer that cannot remarry. God’s grace is sufficient in all circumstances that we can bring glory to him in whatever situation one finds themselves.

BIG IDEA: Remarriage is allowed only for the one who divorces with biblical permission. The two permissions given in scripture are adultery and abandonment.¹⁸

- **Pray:** Make a list and pray over people you know that are married.

¹⁸ See Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views for continued reading.

Week 4: Matthew 5:31-32

Day 4: A Sanctifying Relationship

READ: Matthew 5:31-32

EXPLORE:

The process of being continually sanctified¹⁹ as a believer comes with frequent moments of conviction and corresponding repentance. The more we mature in our relationship with God, the more we realize our immaturity. Certainly, the more we learn about God the more there is to unlearn. Marriage is no different.

One of the most helpful things we can realize when we consider biblical marriage is how corrupted our current view of marriage is in modernity. Our culture and contexts have often taught us that marriage is a means of self-gratification, and a temporary commitment predicated on the fulfillment of one or more parties. This looks nothing like how the Scriptures depict God-honoring marriage.

The Bible uniformly presents God's good design for marriage as a lifelong union between a husband and a wife. Also, the Scriptures describe marriage as a powerful and sanctifying relationship which is designed by God not merely to grow happiness, but to deepen holiness.

Prior to the Enlightenment, marriage was often thought of as an institution which came with meaningful duty, purposeful self-denial, and the continuation of societal contribution through one's offspring. The 17th and 18th centuries came with a great deal of change.

Instead of finding meaning through covenantal loyalty to one's spouse, "marriage" experienced a significant deterioration as it

¹⁹ Sanctified can be defined as being made holy, set apart, or consecrated.

was falsely understood as a means of experiencing self-gratification and personal fulfillment. “Marriage” became a breakable partnership of individuals who viewed their agreement viable only insofar as it visibly benefited both. Again, this unbiblical understanding of marriage has persisted in our culture today.

In a culture that lives and breathes immediate gratification and selfishness, the church needs to not only speak about, but embody biblical marriage. To be clear, biblical marriage certainly includes romance, joy, and intimacy. But it also includes so much more. It includes a profound sense of significance in duty to one’s spouse, fidelity to one’s vows, and a continual conformity to godly character.

This view of marriage which can be found throughout the Scriptures is paramount for a right understanding of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:31-32. Jesus’ audience existed in a culture of competing views. His words would have stood in stark contrast to the pride which often exists in our hearts, excusing all sorts of sin and corroding marriages from the inside out.

BIG IDEA: Marriage is designed to be a deeply sanctifying relationship.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what ways does the biblical view of marriage conflict with our culture’s view of marriage?
- **Question:** If you’re married, how has your relationship resulted in your increased sanctification? If you are unmarried, how do you imagine marriage would challenge and stretch you personally?

Week 4: Matthew 5:31-32

Day 5: No Fault Divorce

READ TOGETHER: Genesis 2:21-24, Matthew 19:3-9

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Imagine there was a practice in ancient times that said if you take away your neighbor's property, then you should give him a certificate of ownership. This sounds absurd, but the practice of divorce in Jesus' time was no less absurd. It was what we would call a no-fault divorce.

This was not how God had designed marriage to go for humanity. A man was to leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two would become one flesh. This marital bond was not meant to be broken by any man.

Moses did permit a certificate of divorce to be given, but this was due to the hardness of men's hearts. This certificate was not a precept of God but was rather meant to keep men from rashly or hastily divorcing their wives. It made it a legal process in writing rather than a simple word of mouth practice. It made men work a little harder to get divorced, but soon the practice became widespread.

Jesus' teaching was meant to recover the true nature of marriage and divorce. Jesus held to the original marriage ordinance recorded in Genesis. Just as the Pharisees and scribes were not

teaching the spiritual aspects of the law, they were also not teaching that no-fault divorce caused adultery. We need a recovery of this teaching in our own day if we are going to see families thrive.

BIG IDEA: A certificate of divorce does not eliminate adultery.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What does it mean to become one flesh?

- **Question:** What other Biblical justification is given in Scripture to divorce and why do you believe God limits it to only these two?

Week 5: Matthew 5:33-37

Day 1: A Day to Explore

READ: Matthew 5:33-37

EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Question:** In your own words, what do you think is Jesus' main point in Matthew 5:33-37?

- **Question:** Read Exodus 20:7. There is good evidence that Pharisees in Jesus' day taught that, as long as you didn't take an oath using God's name, you could swear by anything else you select. (ex: *your family, your city, your head*)
 - Why might people be tempted to swear on something else rather than simply saying "yes" or "no"?

 - Why do you think Jesus spoke against this practice?

- **Question:** Matthew 5:37 reads, “*Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.*” What are some factors that make this verse challenging to apply in your own life?

- **Question:** On a scale of 1-10, how well would you say you embody integrity in the following areas?
 - Keeping Your Verbal Commitments ___/10
 - Avoiding Gossip ___/10
 - Possessing Integrity of Word and Deed ___/10
 - Thoughtfully Articulating Critique ___/10
 - Verbalizing Encouragements ___/10
 - Being a Person of Honorable Words ___/10
 - Telling the Truth ___/10

- **Activity:** Spend time in prayer that you would honor God with your words, commitments, and integrity.

Week 5: Matthew 5:33-37

Day 2: The Witness of our oaths

READ: Matthew 33:37, James 5:12, Leviticus 19:12

EXPLORE:

Jesus continued His contrast of the old and the new by touching on the everyday word, or oaths, of His followers. He commanded His followers not to take oaths by heaven, because it is the very throne of God. He said to not swear by earth, because it is God's footstool, nor can we swear by Jerusalem, because it is God's city. Also included in these commands, is a command to not swear by one's head, which is confusing upon a first glance.

However, in the context of their day it referenced a frequent practice of circumventing oaths by swearing by "less Holy" things. The Jew's would avoid taking oaths that used the Name of God. Instead of this, they would use substitutes, like swearing on their head, or Jerusalem. A modern parallel to this would be the exclamation, "I swear on my mother's grave!", because while you are not necessarily "cursing" you are still taking an oath and swearing. This practice, while keeping the letter of the old laws concerning oaths,²⁰ failed to see the spirit of the law.

However, why is our word even important? Jesus finished His teaching on oaths with a simple command, "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil." A testimony that requires an oath to be trusted is not a good one. If our everyday lives are filled with constant false promises, it raises the question of heart posture. Leviticus 19:12 says that swearing by God's name falsely "profanes" Him. An interesting translation of that phrase, is "to violate the honor of." In our rash oaths, we

²⁰ Some good verses to study would be, Deut. 5:11, Numb. 30:2, Exodus 20:7, and Deut. 23:21-23.

dishonor God. Our lives should match what we say, because we seek to honor the Lord.

This idea of your actions backing up what you speak is repeated in James 5:12, where once again the idea of our life matching our oaths is touched on. James says, “above all,” indicating that what follows is worthy of note. James expands on the reason we should keep our oaths, because not only does unnecessary swearing come from evil and profanes God, but it leads to condemnation. Our testimony as followers of Christ rests upon if what we profess is what we do. If our lives do not match what we say, what good are we? A Christian should seek to follow through on their actions so they can witness to others the steadfastness of Christ.

The witness of our oaths should be twofold. We should seek to honor God by keeping our word, just as He has always kept His. Furthermore, we should keep our oaths as to avoid the condemnation of others, and remain above reproach to nonbelievers.

BIG IDEA: Our life and our oaths ought to be consistent, so we may not fall into condemnation with others and honor God.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what areas of your life do you find yourself “swearing by your head” to sneak around God’s law?
- **Question:** Do you find yourself needing to promise and swear to be trusted? Or do people take your word by itself?

Week 5: Matthew 5:33-37

Day 3: From Pinky Promises to Plain Truth

READ: Matthew 5:33-37

EXPLORE:

Have you ever had a friend who over-promises everything? You know, the one who says, "Look, I swear I'll never be late again..." as they stroll in twenty minutes behind schedule. Or maybe you're more familiar with the classic, "cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye" routine—because nothing says "trustworthiness" like threatening self-harm, right?

In our world today words come cheap. Like internet comments, they're free and everywhere. In an attempt to add more weight to what they say, people often use strong, dramatic language to dress up some of the most mundane things to make them sound more substantial. In a world filled with overblown promises and exaggerated commitments, being a person of plain speech has become revolutionary.

Imagine a world where everyone's word could be trusted. No more need for pinky promises, notarized documents, or elaborate oaths. Just plain, simple truth. It might almost sound like a fairytale, but what if our integrity was enough? What if we let our "yes" mean yes and our "no" mean no to the point that it carried the full weight of our character? What if being people of the Word meant we also became people who kept our word.

In Matthew 5, Jesus isn't just trying to give us a rule about oaths; He's challenging us to be people of integrity. It's about more than just telling the truth. It's about being truthful. It's about living in such a way that people can rely on you without you needing to add anything extra to your word. It's about your actions consistently backing up your words. As we are reminded in 1 John 3:18, *"let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth."*

As we strive to be people of integrity we look to Jesus. He didn't need to swear by anything because His entire life was a testament to the truth. When He said something, it was as good as done, for His words were always purposefully chosen, specifically directed, and spoken under complete surrender to the Father's will.²¹

Let us rise to the challenge set by Jesus, not merely as people who hear His words, but as those who embody them. Imagine our speech if we consistently lived knowing that one day we will give an account for every careless, empty word we have spoken.²² Imagine the impact if each of us committed to letting our words echo the truth of our hearts and the faithfulness of our Savior, transforming our world one honest interaction at a time.

BIG IDEA: In a world filled with exaggerated promises, Jesus calls us to embody integrity and honesty, where our words reflect the genuine authenticity of our hearts.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Are there any specific areas in your life where you struggle to be consistently truthful or reliable. Think about your recent conversations and commitments. Are there times when you felt the need to reinforce your words?

- **Challenge:** Challenge yourself to speak with genuine, simple honesty in all your conversations for a day. Reflect on how it feels and how others respond.

²¹ See John 12:49-50 for reference.

²² See Matthew 12:36 for reference.

Week 5: Matthew 5:33-37

Day 4: Humble Planning

READ: Matthew 5:33-37

EXPLORE:

In this text, we have seen the importance Jesus places on the reliability of one's word. Jesus begins this section of the text by commanding His disciples to only speak truthfully and remain faithful to one's word before God. Jesus ends this section of the text by calling His disciples to exemplify that same level of honesty and sincerity before men, saying "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil." (v. 37). Clearly, our words are called to carry with them trustworthiness. However, as it relates to the future, how can we speak in a trustworthy manner when there are certainly things we do not know nor control? Does James contradict Jesus when he writes "...you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'"?²³

When considering this topic, it may be helpful to note the difference between God's decretive (sovereign) will and His preceptive (revealed) will. The *decretive*, or sovereign, will of God is that which God has *decreed* and will come to pass because God has ordained it. Alternatively, God's preceptive, or revealed, will is that which God has revealed and desires man to follow after (i.e., His commands). While we may not know all that is in God's sovereign will, we can have certainty about God's revealed will because He has given us His commandments in His Word (the Bible). Surely, God does not call us to speak with certainty about all that could happen in the future, nor should we pridefully plan out our lives thinking that we ultimately control our destiny with no acknowledgement of God. Rather, we are called to obey what God has clearly commanded. It is from this place that we are

²³ See James 4:15 for reference.

called to plan, strategize, and speak truthfully as we recognize God is ultimately in control of everything. As the Proverbs say, *“The heart of a man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.”*²⁴

BIG IDEA: Planning is by no means wrong, nor is it sinful. Rather, the Bible seems to speak highly of a type of planning which is established in humility along with Godly counsel. As we recognize we are held in the sovereign, mighty, and good hand of God, we can plan and act in accordance with God’s revealed will. It is in this space that we are called to simply let our “yes” be “yes” and our “no” be “no.”

APPLY:

- **Question:** Is there an area in your life which you are not following after God’s revealed will which He has shown in His Word?
- **Question:** Do you need to speak with more certainty about the things which you hope to accomplish, recognizing that God is in control of the outcome?

ACTIVITY:

- **Pray** and ask God to show you any area of your life which is not in conformity to God’s revealed will.
- **Ask** the Lord for boldness and wisdom to plan effectively for the advancement of His Kingdom and our conformity to the image of Christ.

²⁴ See Proverbs 16:9 for reference.

Week 5: Matthew 5:33-37

Day 5: No swearing

READ TOGETHER: Psalm 24:4, Numbers 30:2, Exodus 23:1

***Instructions:** We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

“The lady doth protest too much, methinks.” This is one of Shakespeare’s most famous quotes from Hamlet. The line is spoken by Gertude, to say that the promises of love spoken by a queen to her husband seemed excessive and insincere. We understand that the more a person makes outlandish promises and is filled with many words the more likely that person is lying.

Jesus is expositing the third commandment that we should not take the Lord’s name in vain. Not only should we not swear falsely which is obvious, but we also should not promise by heaven, earth, or any created thing. Today we are more likely to swear on our mother’s grave, the life of our children, or any number of things. Jesus says all of these types of oaths are evil and a violation of the third commandment. The reason for this is that all oaths or words are connected to God, and it trivializes a promise. If we know that all of our commitments are before God, then it is unnecessary to swear by anything else.

Now this command does not mean that there are no lawful oaths. In a wedding the couple will exchange vows or oaths to one another before God. Hannah vowed to give Samuel unto the Lord after he was weaned, and this was pleasing to God. We can make

proper oaths under God, but not by any created thing. We should also be slow to speak when it comes to oaths before God. Any rash oath to God is foolish and God will not hold us guiltless. Our primary words should simply be a yes or no. When we are faithful to our word, we don't need to add anything extra to it. We can walk in simplicity and people will come to find us trustworthy.

BIG IDEA: Making an oath before anything other than God is sin.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Why do you think people are more likely to be lying when they make excessive promises?

- **Question:** How is simply saying yes or no a powerful witness to the world?



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